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# *TRIBUNES OF THE PEOPLE*



P. R. RAMACHANDRA RAO

MR. P. R. RAMACHANDRA RAO is among the better known of Indian writers. After a distinguished academic career, he was for some time Professor of English and later Education Editor of *The Times of India*; now he practises law. His earlier books, *Decay of Indian Industries* and, more recently, *Choudhury and His Art*, at once established his title to be heard. Mr. Rao presents here vibrant studies of the Congress leaders, Tribunes of the Indian people. Incidentally, he sums up an epoch. Mr. Rao's forceful judgments will be read with avidity.

# **TRIBUNES**

**OF**

# **THE PEOPLE**

**BY**

**P. R. RAMACHANDRA RAO**

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## PROLOGUE

Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Rajagopalachari, Sarojini Naidu—in the history of patriotism it is hard to find such another galaxy. Figures of destiny, they dominate the Indian scene, swaying millions of their people. They are His Majesty's Opposition in India.

They sum up an epoch, the Gandhi era in Indian politics. But Gandhi himself is not in here. Yet he is by no means out of the picture. He is the picture itself, immanent and transcending it. To bring him to a focus in this book would be to blur the contents entirely.

These essays in biography are woven out of common material; they verge on each other. Yet I have striven to present an evolving narrative, eschewing repetition; sometimes, perhaps, a familiar circumstance is thrown in to fix the setting, unavoidably.

Much study, naturally, has gone into the preparation of this book. I have written objectively, deliberately



omitting personal reminiscences. As an Indian, I have written with obvious emotion; yet I hope I have not been uncritical.

I have my friend R. K. Karanjia to thank for welcoming, through his *Blitz*, basic parts of this material since recast. My former student at the Indian Women's University, Anasuya Joshi, kindly translated for me Mahadev Desai's book on Vallabhbhai Patel from the original Gujarati; I have her to thank.

MADRAS,  
*December 31, 1944.*

P. R. RAMACHANDRA RAO.

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## INVOCATION

"Give us men !

Men of light and leading,  
The nation's welfare spreading ;  
Men of faith, not of fiction,  
Men of lofty aim in action,

Give us men !

Strong and stalwart ones !

Men whom highest hope inspires,  
Men who trample self beneath them,  
Men who make their country wreath them,  
As her noble sons, worthy of her sires,  
Men who never shame their mothers,  
Men who never fail their brothers,  
Men who when the tempest gathers,  
Grasp the standard of their fathers ;  
Men who strike for home and altar,  
Let the coward cringe and falter,  
God defend the right."





## JAWAHARLAL NEHRU.

'**A**N agnostic Lenin meekly obedient to the precepts of a Christian Tolstoy.' In that exquisite phrase (George Slocombe's) you have the remarkable paradox that is Jawaharlal Nehru.

The man breathes fire. He staggers by talk of revolutions and upheavals. He overbears with a dictatorial imperativeness. In a belligerent *national* India he might have led vast armies. He is a hurricane on foot careering with an iconoclastic relish. He strikes thick at the primary flaws in our organised society. He is a rebel born. He chafes at restraint and revolts against overweening authority. He holds nothing sacrosanct. He sweeps outright age-long shibboleths, masquerading under various forms of dull insincerity.

Yet, his foot-steps are bent acquiescingly, almost unwillingly, after the 'meek destructive' Gandhi: there is no revolt against his saintly authority—no cleavage, no divergence. But with much that is in the Congress Nehru is out of tune. He is torn between two worlds: the one, medieval and feudal and dying, and the other, the new, powerless to be born. He faces the colossal backwardness of India. He has perforce to bridle his 'stern, unbending, ardent' spirit. Yet, he loosened one great truth—Independence—and the country echoed round.

Nehru, of all Congress leaders, has the correct historical perspective. He appraises the Indian struggle in

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the proper context of world events. The world problem, he says, is Reaction *versus* Liberty. The freedom movements fight a common battle against a common foe, under different names—Fascism, Imperialism. These are the two faces of capitalism which, grown opulent, thirsts for worlds to conquer.

Nehru's obsession is not India so much as the political destiny of the world, of mankind. Gandhi is interested in India here and now; he has a magnificent grasp of our day-to-day problems—our social autocracy, our inane communalism, our fossilised religious practices. Nehru's mind functions beyond the frontiers of our domestic ailments; he is too much in the future, his gaze is lifted aloft and scans our distant destiny. He outsteps his age. Nehru, says Romain Rolland, has made the grand ancient motto his own: "I am a Man. Nothing human is foreign to me."

Jawaharlal is a poet, a dreamer. The relations that ultimately matter, he says, are those between man and man, between man and woman, between man and society. It is the cursedness of our times that we have perpetually to be on the offensive, fighting and yet fighting. We have to end this vast misery, this hunger and poverty around us. The hungry mouths look up and have to be fed before their lips can move to the rhythm of happiness.

This sleek, smart, charming, well-bred gentleman is Jawaharlal Nehru, three times President of the Indian National Congress, a lone Titanic spirit, born before his time, who walks with a dogged, determined step, without

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fear or respite, the weary road to India's freedom. The man is a firebrand, an explosive. He is the man of action, the man of the hour. Danger rather attracts him. Gandhi has said of Nehru: "He is quite capable of mounting the gallows with a smile on his lips." He is the idol of the younger generation, a political intoxicant. He is India's hope. Over the length of the peninsula the name of Nehru works magic. He constitutes with Gandhi our *magnum opus*—India's contribution to contemporary history.

## II

Nehru springs from a patrician stock of Kashmiri Brahmins, Kauls originally, who came down from the mountain valleys 'to seek fame and fortune in the rich plains below.' The Kauls, with a tremendous pride of race and heritage, were high dignitaries in the crumbling Moghul empire; reputed scholars and statesmen. Nehru means 'canal'—a curious surname for a torrential personality. He was born (November 14, 1889) with that invaluable blessing, a great father. *Swaraj* is in his blood says Laski. Motilal Nehru, 'with a handsome face that in after years became with the beauty of age like an old carving' had dominated the Allahabad Bar for upwards of a quarter-century. (Motilal, curiously for all his eminence, never graduated, and was, as a boy, chiefly notable for his numerous pranks and escapades).

The future President of the Indian National Congress was brought up by an English governess (as a child he rather admired the English) amidst westernised environs, -



and tutored by an Irishman, a Mr. Brookes, who taught him a good deal of Theosophy and Sinn Fein. The Japanese victory over Russia in 1905, a crisis in Asiatic history, happened towards his boyhood.

When not quite fifteen, Nehru went to Harrow (it was a grand affair, the whole family set sail and saw him admitted) and interested himself, somewhat prematurely, in politics. He carried off Trevelyan's Garibaldi for a prize-book, a significant memento. From Harrow, outgrowing it, Nehru went to Cambridge. At Cambridge with Jawaharlal were comrades of destiny—J. M. Sen Gupta, T. A. K. Sherwani, Dr. Syed Mahmud and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew. The shy and diletantish undergraduate of the Natural Science Tripos (chemistry, geology and botany) devoured a heavy lot of literature, history and sociology. He developed, what he calls, a 'vague kind of cyrenaicism,' mostly the result of an overdose of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde.

Big events, happening at home, were filtering through: of the arrest of Tilak and the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai. Nehru was stirred tremendously: ('but there was not a soul in Harrow to whom I could talk about it'). Cambridge was semi-highbrow, very sophisticated and cocksure, and he 'did not go deep down into anything.' He was vaguely disturbed about the political struggle in India and sometimes argued heatedly about it—yet it was all make-believe. For the most part Jawaharlal drifted, 'a man about town,' mildly attracted by Fabianism. The inevitable Bar, the paternal profession, called him to the

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Middle Temple, and in 1912, the prodigal returned to India, a somewhat 'superior' person, 'a bit of a prig.' He had been seven years in England.

### III

Jawaharlal settled down to practise law (contemporary Allahabad Law Reports carry his punctuated appearances) but the lawyer's job is hard to reconcile with public work, and no decent man in India, Nehru has said, can keep out of politics for long. But there was little politics in India in 1912. The Congress—barring Tilak (and he was in jail)—was a very Moderate upper-class affair of morning coats and timid resolutions, broadening from precedent to precedent. Gandhi had not risen yet; only Gokhale, earnest and highstrung, impressed. Gradually politics stirred again. Dr. Besant had started the Home Rule Leagues, Jawaharlal promptly joined up, and then in 1916 Gandhi flashed across the Indian scene. Nehru plumped for Gandhi.

Jallianwallabagh. Jawaharlal had gone to the Punjab, with C. R. Das, for the enquiry—here is from his account of a train journey from Amritsar: "One of them was holding forth in an aggressive and triumphant tone and soon I discovered that he was Dyer, the hero of Jallianwallabagh and he was describing his Amritsar experiences. He pointed out how he had the whole town at his mercy and he had felt like reducing the rebellious city to a heap of ashes, but he took pity on it and refrained." (Remember Ellis in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*?. 'Look at

Amritsar. Look how they caved in after that. Dyer knew the stuff to give them. Poor old Dyer!'). That is the British slant.

Motilal took a lawyer's cold-blooded view of politics; the *Swadeshi* and boycott movements, with their background of religious nationalism, did not appeal to him. He had a host of English friends and drank English wine; he was a very modern man with a keen enquiring intellect and a sceptical philosophy. He watched his son's impetuous drift towards extremism with alarm. There were endless discussions between father and son, 'often ending up very heatedly and not always pleasantly.' Gandhi's negative obstructionism and its corollary of jail-filling seemed preposterous to Motilal; yet he hungered to know his son, suffering a terrible mental agony the while. Jawaharlal writes: "Father—I discovered later—actually tried sleeping on the floor to find out what it was like, as he thought that this would be my lot in prison." The man loved his son too much; what was life worth if Jawahar did not share it? And, one by one, things smote him—Dr. Besant's internment, the Punjab happenings; and he reeled from his Moderate position. He took a long time to make up his mind: he had long talks with Gandhi and C.R. Das. And then, the die was cast, and, having cast it, Motilal did not look back, taking his stand by Gandhi, until death alone parted them. The *Statesman* whimpered: "a fond Edwardian father whose delightful daughter suddenly became a suffragette and broke his windows was, perhaps, in a similar position."

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Jawaharlal's ideological breach with Government stumbled against an inane challenge, given without the slightest provocation. Nehru had gone (1920) with his convalescing mother and wife to Mussoorie ; an Afghan delegation, negotiating peace with the Indian Government after the Afghan War of 1919, was staying in the same hotel (Savoy) as Nehru. He never spoke to the Afghan diplomats, had nothing to do with them, and was righteously indignant when asked by the local police not to meet the plenipotentiaries. Of course, Nehru refused to obey and was quite characteristically 'externed.' A turning point, his first clash with British authority, the first of unprovoked attacks.

There was a soul of goodness in the externment ; Nehru wandered across the countryside and discovered India. Read his indelible account: "They were in miserable rags, men and women. They showered their affection on us with loving and hopeful eyes, as if we were the bearers of good tidings. I was filled with shame and sorrow, shame at my own easy-going and comfortable life and our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude of semi-naked sons and daughters of India, sorrow at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India. A new picture of India seemed to rise before me, naked, starving, crushed, and utterly miserable." In the murderous heat of the Indian summer, he listened to their countless tales of burdens, of illegal exactions, ejections and unceasing indebtedness, trekking the villages with the streaming *kisans*, feeding with them, sleeping with them.

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in their mud huts. Among them Jawaharlal found his voice and he spoke to them, as man to man, in the one and only language they could understand. He sensed the thrill of mass-feeling, of influencing the mass: "I took to the crowd and the crowd took to me, and yet I never lost myself in it."

## IV

Gandhi said recently: "Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is my legal heir. I am sure when I pass he will take up all the work I do." He is Gandhi's second-in-command. Nehru once told a London audience: "On almost every thing on earth I differ from him. Yet he is invaluable. I follow him." Nehru needs Gandhi as much as, even more than, Gandhi needs him. They have reacted upon each other, in infinite variations of the Indian theme, for a quarter-century now. These political antipodes complement each other 'agreeing to differ, differing in their agreement.'

Pattabhi Sitaramayya sums up the antithesis: "Gandhi is the inspiration, Jawaharlal the instrument. If Jawaharlal analyses, Gandhi synthetises. If Jawaharlal soars high, Gandhi broadens the base and balances his centre of gravity." Nehru has serious ideological differences with Gandhi, about his religio-ethics and its mess-up with politics. He was furious about the disastrous aftermath of Chauri Chaura — 'our mounting hopes tumbled to the ground.' The non-violent method is not with Nehru a religion or unchallengeable creed as with Gandhi; it was a policy promising certain results and on those results alone

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it had to be judged finally. Nehru writes: "I dislike violence intensely, and yet I am full of violence myself." Gandhi's insistence on the spinning franchise (a *labour* franchise would have been excellent) has amazed Nehru. When Gandhi launched his salt campaign Jawaharlal wrote: "We were bewildered and could not fit in a national struggle for common salt." Nehru does not understand Gandhi's fasts, his psychic coercions, his personal and self-created entanglements. A vast mental distance separates the two. Nehru feels Gandhi is hopelessly wrong in many things, ideologically amazingly backward sometimes, preaching harmful doctrines impossible of achievement. He has a horror of Gandhi's idealisation of poverty.

Nehru's quarrel is with the system, with the acquisitive society that produces it, and not with individuals. Gandhi's concern is with the individual, with his moral and spiritual betterment. He is not taken up with reform in the mass. Even his 'socialism' is just a vague, muddled humanitarianism, nothing to do with the economic structure of society. Jawaharlal's more empirical business is with 'the fierce conflicts of individuals for personal gain, the ruthless struggles of groups and classes, the inhuman suppression and exploitation of one group by another.'

Nehru's love for Gandhi is profound, even mawkish. During Gandhi's fast unto death Jawaharlal languished in Dehra Dun jail; he wrote to his daughter, tortured: "My little world in which he has occupied such a big place shakes and there seems to be darkness and emptiness everywhere. Shall I not see him again? And whom shall I go

to when I am in doubt and require wise counsel, or am afflicted and in sorrow and need loving comfort?" That something rocklike in Gandhi's unimpressive features, his loin cloth and bare body attracts him—"there was a royalty and kingliness in him." Gandhi had changed the face of India, given pride and character to a cringing and demoralised people. He had given India glimpses of her own soul. He had made the Indian problem a world problem.

Jawaharlal's portrait of Gandhi is a masterpiece: 'a man of the keenest intellect, of fine feeling and good taste, wide vision ; very human, and yet essentially the ascetic who has suppressed his passions and emotions, sublimated them and directed them in spiritual channels ; a tremendous personality, drawing people to himself like a magnet, and calling out fierce loyalties and attachments.'

That is the spell.

And because of his 'surrender' to Gandhi, Nehru is violently assailed. He is the younger generation's lost hope, politically ineffective.

## V

In 1920 Gandhi launched his big idea, Non-Cooperation, and entered on his Indian phase. The Indian millions, backward and broken-up, were stirred, and straightened their backs ; a new India was born, self-conscious, determined, self-righteous. *Swaraj* was in the air and a new spirit of defiance was abroad. Government, Lord Reading confessed, were 'puzzled and perplexed.' There was a

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widespread distrust of Congress intentions. Sedition throve on repression. The Prince of Wales was coming and the Congress proclaimed a total boycott. That was the signal for mass arrests. Men and women, by the thousand, rode to jail on a sporadic wave of enthusiasm. There was a scramble to get into jails. The Nehrus were arrested, father and son, and put a brave face on it. (Jawaharlal has set up a record for political incarceration in India: he has been jailed seven times—in 1921, 1922, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1940 and 1942—and has spent some ten years in prison). Then something happened. In February 1922 an infuriated mob in an obscure village (Chauri Chaura) in Bihar set fire to a police-station and burnt down some half-a-dozen police men with it; at once Gandhi, to the consternation of his perplexed following, called off the movement. Government thankfully arrested him and sent him to jail for a six-year term.

During the years of the Congress schism and the Swaraj Party's fizzle-out, Nehru put in a thoroughly competent term as President of Allahabad Municipality. Even Government, no friend of his, commended his administration. But he was caught up in the steel frame of the municipal system and could get through nothing really worthwhile. Government, authoritarian and paternal, rather obstructed progress and innovation at every step. Nehru, fed up, resigned.

There was trouble at Nabha. The Maharaja had been deposed and a British Administrator, ruling instead, had stopped some religious ceremony. The Akalis, unbending



spirits, sent *jathas* (batches) to the frontier and the police had given them a pounding. Requested, Nehru went to investigate with two friends; they were handcuffed and marched through the streets to a filthy jail, full of mosquitoes and rats. The prisoners were handcuffed and chained together : they could neither sleep nor sit up, and mice ran all over the helpless Gullivers. The trial, by an almost illiterate magistrate, was a pitiful farce and lasted two weeks. They were allowed no lawyer from outside (Motilal himself went to see his son): "at every turn we were referred to Nabha laws and procedure to justify the denial of the most ordinary rights." Jawaharlal got two and a half years' jail, but there was a furore in the country, and the State, relenting, released their onerous prisoner, unconditionally. He came out ill with typhoid caught in the noxious prison.

This unbridled autocracy left a bitter taste. No friend of the Indian States, the majority of them Nehru has denounced as 'sinks of reaction and incompetence' — feudal relics. But the evil, he says, lies in the system, 'offspring of British power and suckled by Imperialism for its own purposes.' Nehru whips out: "The problems of government require something more than a knowledge of how to manage polo ponies or recognise the breeds of dogs or have the skill to kill large numbers of inoffensive animals."

Nehru cannot understand Gandhi's hush-hush policy towards the States, his theory of trusteeship, a burden that not 'even Plato's philosopher-kings could have borne worthily.' It is beyond him how Gandhi, with all his

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flaming passion' for the downtrodden, can bless these decaying medieval relics of oppression — 'he pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird,' says Nehru.

### VI

Towards the close of 1926 Nehru went to Europe to recuperate (the typhoid, a Nabha gift, had shattered him) and attended the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities. George Lansbury presided and delegates had foregathered from China, Mexico, Java, Indo-China, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Arabia and North Africa. They formed a League against Imperialism—Einstein was on it and Madame Sun Yat Sen and Romain Rolland. Nehru made up his mind that the world struggle for freedom was one and indivisible—against Imperialism, and crossed over to Russia to study the mechanism of deliverance. He came away convinced that Socialism was alone the panacea, and, back in India, quite naturally blew off his new steam—it rattled ensconced interests. "The old order has gone and all the King's horses and all the King's men will not set it up again," he thundered.

To Nehru India's battles were fought in Spain and China. In July 1938 he was in Barcelona, listening to its 'bombed laughter.' He braved the front line and risked Nazi and Fascist bullets whizzing from across Franco's trenches. In London afterwards he addressed a Spanish rally in Trafalgar Square. Freedom, betrayed, called out loudly; Nehru 'enlisted,' kindled by the same compulsive fire that drew Toller and Hemingway to Spain. In August 1939 he was in Chungking burrowing into the

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shelters while the enemy bombed overhead. "If I deserted them what could I cherish in India?" he asked. To Nehru all politics is organic—he feels he is part of a vast grand army marching forward to realise human fate and destiny, 'marching step by step with history.'

Nehru's 'internationalism' is the despair of Congress orthodoxy. Writes Sitaramayya: "His (Nehru's) circle is intersected by the circle of Spain, of America, of China and of Russia whose centres, however, are eccentric with that of India. Hence, it is that the vision suffers from want of focus. There is diplopia."

The Nehrus were in Moscow when the Simon Commission was announced; a few days afterwards Jawaharlal accompanied his father to Sir (no Lord yet) John Simon's chambers for a consultation in a Privy Council appeal; yet some time later he headed a demonstration against the Simon Commission and was *lathi*-charged. (All his personal friendship for Sir Stafford Cripps, much banked upon, did not prevent a cleavage on the Indian issue). It was a tremendous hammering, a battering with *lathis* and batons by mounted police. Nehru writes: "I felt half-blinded with the blows, and sometimes a dull anger seized me and a desire to hit out." The Simon Commission however, secretly crept away in the far distance, back-sliding the charging and battering!

## VII

Elected President of the Congress, Nehru linked up the Indian struggle with the world keyboard. He writes: "Inevitably we are led to the only possible solution—the

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establishment of a socialist order, first within national boundaries, and eventually in the world as a whole." If political or social institutions stood in the way they simply had to go. The meaning of these words was unmistakable and capitalists, led by A.D. Shroff, took up arms against him. Nehru merely warned, in reply, that *revolution* would come if evolution were not sped up !

To Nehru the issue is simple: "If vested interests come in the way of an eminently desirable change, is it wise or moral to attempt to preserve them at the cost of mass misery and poverty ?" There is of course no question of *confiscation* ('the object is not to deprive, but to provide') although a clash of interests is inevitable and there is no middle path. And suffering and dislocation are merely the incidents of change ! Reformism is an impossible solution in India ; 'there is no greater mistake than to leap the abyss in two jumps' — only a revolutionary plan can solve her problems. Yet says Nehru: "If socialism is to be built up in India it will have to grow out of Indian conditions." Mark these words: there has been much ignorant cavilling that he endorses the exotic sapling from Russia.

Nehru's sympathies are of course with communism, but his communism is not "enough" for his comrades—his *bourgeois* background irritates them. ("I am a typical *bourgeois*, brought up in *bourgeois* surroundings, with all the early prejudices that this training has given me"). Dogmatism he detests, and *Das Kapital* is not just scripture to him; with Lenin he feels: "nothing is final ;

we must always learn from circumstances." He dislikes much that has happened in Russia—its doctrinaire orgies of unnecessary violence, the wholesale regimentation—yet he feels that Russia offers the greatest hope to the world.

Corollary to Nehru's philosophy is Economic Planning, conceived in the spirit of science, somewhat on the Russian plan. His National Planning Committee was a monument of thoroughness (with 29 sub-committees and over 200 experts). Nehru warned: "we should all have to work and for those who do not work, I hope there will be no room in India."

The communal problem, Nehru says, has nothing to do with religion, fundamentally ; in the Indian context it is an economic problem, middle class and *bourgeois*. It does not touch the masses. The several communal groups are primarily interested in the problem of jobs; they think in terms of spoils and prizes and patronage, and in the condition pre-requisite, British imperialism. Gandhi clinches the issue: "It is the British statesmen who are responsible for the divisions in India's ranks, and divisions will continue so long as the British sword holds India under bondage." To Nehru the communal leaders are naturally political reactionaries.

All talk of Pakistan, 'the figment of a few imaginations only,' he condemns—'politically the idea is absurd, economically it is fantastic; it is hardly worth considering'—because, the concept of a 'vague, spread-out,

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indeterminate' Muslim *nation* is a denial of nationality, an abrogation of modern civilisation and ethnic unity, a flight in the face of history. The Muslim League is not even basically, as commonly supposed, fighting a *different* culture; it is, in reality, fighting Congress radicalism, its progressive ideas, says Nehru.

To Nehru Religion is a killjoy, 'narrow and intolerant, self-centred and egotistic,' a vested interest and a reactionary force. He writes: "The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organised religion in India, has filled me with horror." He would make a clean sweep of it. Only Chinese Taoism, fundamentally ethical, yet tinged with scepticism, has any appeal for him. The problems of this life sufficiently absorb him; he has no use for the after life and is just not interested in what happens after death.

## VIII

Nehru is not an orator. He does not batter you with a volley of pompous sentences, there is no attempt at the grand style. He begins slowly. As he speaks, the thought-sequence opens out for him. His voice is soft, mellifluous, of exquisite timbre, grave. Beneath the surface of his modulous words roars the current of thought: it bubbles, it boils and it overwhelms. Nehru steps on to the platform. You look at his still handsome features (not young but not old yet), wonderfully photogenic. While he speaks his face assumes a severity, the brows are knitted, and, as the sentences are delivered, the eyes flash fire. The man has

been roused, he strikes fast and thick. Neck out-thrust, his taut body quivers as his right hand rends the air with telling sentences. He has pauses, pauses that belong to an overflowing mind. The mind is white-hot, it leaps and it soars ; speech snaps over-weighted by the flood of thought.

An aristocratic nonchalance informs his proceedings. He wields power with magnificent grace. He comes to you with the dignity and authority of the Indian nation. There is no pretence of humility. He reaches the multitudes by the same assertive domination. Like a tempest he arrives, brushing aside the mobbing crowd. The crowd falls back, dazed and complimented. And then he is up, delivering caustic home-truths. And the crowd applauds.

Gandhi's example had bred among us a sentimental meek humility, a vague humanitarianism and an excessive abnegation. Nehru's significance to the Congress is in his expurgation of its 'soft' ideology. One cannot, he says, have non-violence all the time. He will have no sickly demonstrations of prostrate adulation. He is forthrightly, often distressingly, frank. He said once: "Gentlemen, you have been too long here, get out."

Nehru is master of superlative English prose : Gunther thinks hardly a dozen men alive write English as well as Nehru. His monumental *Autobiography* is a testament of India, the impassioned story of a nation in birth-throes ; it is, incidentally, a searching life-history, subtle, sophisticated, sceptic and intensely critical. His love of English poetry is innate, passionate—it gushes.

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Nehru it is well known, has a terrible temper, an inherited trait. Sitaramayya writes: "Jawaharlal begins his discussions with a thunder, abuses everybody about him, and creates the disturbance that a crocodile causes in thigh-deep waters" and adds, offended, "to a colleague he can be rude." (The Congress Working Committee Nehru has described as Gandhi's rubber-stamps). This 'unbalanced emotionalism' he attributes to Nehru's superiority complex (and inferiority complex *vis-a-vis* Gandhi) and wonders that the people have suffered it at all. Ranjee Shahani could not suffer it and committed to print an unhappy trifling experience which Nehru may not care to remember. Krishna Hutheesing instances her brother's irascible temper: once Jawaharlal had set himself to teach her mathematics in a most fascinating way, but one day she tripped up certain things he had taught her—Nehru, exasperated, flung her books away and asked her to get out. But he was, like all short-tempered men, repentant the next second, putting his arms around her and apologising.

Nehru is thoroughly honest with himself. Become to young men and women 'a bit of a hero' with an added halo of romance, he confesses shockingly: "My reputation as a hero is entirely a bogus one, and I do not at all feel heroic." His rare humour tickles, for instance: "My barrack and enclosure were popularly known throughout the gaol as *Kuttaghar*—the Dog House. This was an old name which had nothing to do with me." As a child his chief grievance was that his birthday came so rarely!



Nehru is ingrown. Years of prison-life have thrown him very much upon himself, and he has always come back to himself, ultimately, even from Gandhi. He feels lonely and homeless ('Anand Bhawan' is just memories) and India seems a strange and bewildering land to him. Kamala 'is no more'; his father and his mother and R. S. Pandit—one by one they pass away. Retracting into his shell, Nehru has piled up a towering mental altitude. Like Bunyan, he wrote a classic in prison, the *Autobiography*, his 'Mein Kampf.' His 1569-page *World History*, also a jail product, is a staggering performance, a monument of knowledge and intellect. Nehru has no friends: his acquaintances are an international assortment—the Chiangs, Ernst Toller, Romain Rolland, Col. Johnson, Ellen Wilkinson. He refused to see Mussolini.

Nehru has a touching, now almost elegiac, passage on his wife. He was twenty-six when he married her, 'a slip of a girl,' just seventeen. Delicate and sensitive, she unfolded like a flower: in the beginning, lost in politics, he nearly overlooked her; then came her recurring illnesses and his pilgrimages to prison. They met rarely in the shining intervals of saddened lives. Then she became very ill, 'frail and utterly weak, a shadow of herself, struggling feebly with her illness,' until she could struggle no more. She went when he needed her most—'why, we had just begun to know and understand each other really.' She had sustained Nehru, the hero and the patriot, and had ebbed out in the process, extinguishing herself. She gave him their only child, Indira.

## JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Oxford-educated Indira, married (intercommunally) to the ex-President of London University Socialist Union, Feroze Gandhi, has delivered of a boy and adds a further generation to the Nehru saga. Jawaharlal has become a grandpa !

Nehru writes introspectively : " I have become a queer mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere." That is, in essence, his tragedy. He has the feeling of an exile, of spiritual loneliness. He has 'an inner hunger unsatisfied.' His real conflict lies within him, a conflict of ideas, desires and loyalties, of subconscious depths struggling with outer circumstances.' In himself he represents an atom of that mighty world-flood surging towards freedom. He may not reach the goal, but 'it is the struggle that gives value to life,' not so much the fulfilment. Nehru has no past regrets ; were he given the chance to go over his life again, his major decisions would be untouched. Like Socrates he feels that it is bad to disown one's past. What a past ! Was it worthwhile ? Nehru's answer is—it most certainly *was*.

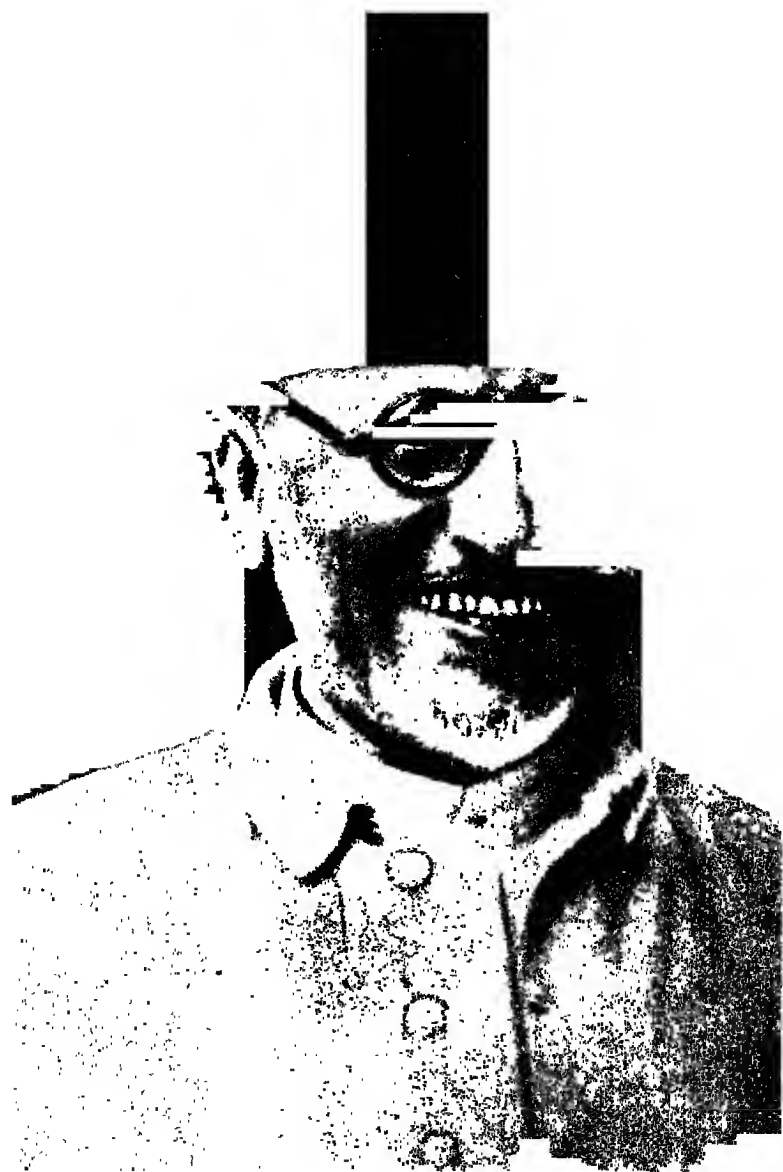
This chapter can have no ending. Nehru's life shows but half : the best of it is yet to be. His course is, like the diurnal sun's, behind the clouds sometimes to emerge blazing forth again in blinding sheen. In prison to-day, right into the *media res* of contemporary history to-morrow. 'The eye contains a far horizon.' When the dawn comes (for India) will Nehru be there to see it ?

## ABUL KALAM AZAD

**M**AULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD is the Muslim President of the Indian National—by no means 'Hindu'—Congress. His election to that high office in March 1940 was not a political stunt, a sop to Muslim sentiment; it was a foregone conclusion, a predetermined plebiscite. Congress history is studded with Muslim Presidents—Badruddin Tyabji, Rahimtullah Sayani, Maulana Mahomed Ali, Hasan Imam, M. A. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Azad himself, who in 1923 was perhaps the youngest President of the Congress, being just thirty-five. "That he is to-day," in this hour of crisis, "the supreme head of the Indian National Congress has deep meaning" as Gandhi says. Azad is the Congress counter-blast to Jinnah.

This immaculate 'Muslim theologian and philosopher, one of the most learned men of the East, a book-worm intellectual and savant,' in John Gunther's idiom, is a political rebel. He rebelled against the Government quite some time (1916) before Gandhi's bold bid for *Swaraj* and was promptly interned. The wheel has come full circle to-day. At the helm of the Indian freedom movement is the same uncompromising Maulana, making the same heroic demand, with precisely similar results. History does repeat itself.

Tall and stately, of ochre-vermilion tint, with luminous eyes, the fine silk *sherwani* sweeping over his rounded shoulders, Azad seems some nobleman of old-world Delhi,





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breathing the best Islamic tradition. He has a singular polish and refinement of demeanour, but with it goes a scholarly reserve. "Abul Kalam Azad," says Jawaharlal Nehru, "has especially cultivated a look of venerable age to give a suitable background to his great learning." A pure reflective intellectual, he is no demagogue. He lacks the mass touch and he knows it; but he is by no means unmindful of the hungry millions who have put him on his 'high pedestal.' He is essentially a metropolitan—he lives in Ballygunge, Calcutta 'when he is not travelling on Congress jobs'—and, despite his passionate faith in *khadi*, he is hardly likely to settle down to the spiritual monotony of the spinning-wheel.

Azad's best friends are his books, for 'books are men of higher stature.' A profound Oriental scholar and philologist, he has an impeccable taste for European literature. He *speaks* little English, it is true, but there is hardly any English poet of note he has not read. Byron, with the added lustre of Missolonghi, is his favourite. He has read and re-read Goethe, Spinoza, Rousseau, Marx, Tolstoy, Ruskin and Havelock Ellis. He has a special relish for the novels of Hugo, Dumas, Scott and Flaubert. And he has read *Madame Bovary*! Philosophy is his forte and he knows all about the Upanishads and the Vedas. An architect of contemporary history, he is a keen student of the pageant of Time. All kinds of books on history and politics he has, and of course several book-shelves of Arabic, Persian and Turkish tomes. Despite, perhaps because of, this numerous company, the Maulana is a lonely man—he has few

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friends. An affable conversationalist, he is reticent to a degree. He is among the country's most forceful speakers; in sheer, incisive eloquence he has few equals—yet he is at his best in a committee. He is not, like Gandhi and Nehru, the people's idol, although 'he has it in him to move millions.'

Always in the front rank, Azad prefers a back seat; incorrigibly shy, he shuns shows and demonstrations. He has a predilection for loneliness that is *not* aloofness. He is not stand-offish; he can be sparkingly convivial in chosen company. He reminds Nehru of the French Encyclopaedists—'essentially the scholar whom circumstances have forced into a life of action.' Azad's phenomenal knowledge is filed, indexed and cross-indexed in his brain-stack; even his casual talk is redolent with wisdom.

(Once the Working Committee had sat down to dinner; a tamarind dish was served; Azad, turning to a South Indian colleague, opened a philological barrage. "You Tamilians are very fond of *tamarind*; but you perhaps do not know the derivation of that word. The Spanish word is *tamarindo*, but the Spaniards borrowed it from the Arabs. In Arabic the word is *tamar-i-Hind*, *tamar* meaning 'date' and *Hind* 'India.' There were no dates in India and this was the fruit that most corresponded with the date. So they called it the 'date of India').

The Maulana has a 'cross-bench' mind; it oscillates between the pros and cons, tossed by his superior intellectuality.

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He is slow to decide, but, arrived at a position, he is firm, definite and unequivocal. When Cripps expounded his proposals Azad told him blandly : " but *Swaraj* is not in them." He was not further interested. " The pity is, Maulana," Motilal Nehru once jokingly told him, " that you see things too quickly." And when he *sees* a thing Azad knows it in its many facets which he expounds with a rare lucidity. He is the diplomat and ambassador of the Congress ; in Sind and in the Punjab he has untied many a political knot, and in the Frontier he created a Ministry.

There is between Azad and Gandhi an abiding bond, deeper than politics. This kinship has existed for nearly three decades. Azad once told Mahadev Desai the secret of the attachment. " Apart from Gandhi's great intellect it was his stainless truth that attracted me towards him. But until 1926 I was more or less critical. Then I happened to read an article of his in *Young India*, in which he laid bare his soul in criticising a trivial lapse by Mrs. Gandhi. She had forgotten to make over to the manager of the Ashram a gift that some one had given her. ' There,' I said to myself, ' is a man whose truth not even his enemies can doubt.' "

With Azad, the Mahatma's is ' the final word.' His own mind, like Nehru's, has pulled in another direction many a time, but always Gandhi's moral instinct ruled above sheer argument. Azad is totally lacking in political ambition ; he fights shy of power. He required all the Mahatma's cajolery and the insistence of the Congress to take its helm.



II

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has the bluest of bloods coursing in him ; a theologian ancestor, Shaikh Jamaluddin Dehlavi, Akbar's celebrated contemporary, risked that emperor's ire by questioning his ' infallibility ' in matters relating to Islam. It was the first instance of *Satyagraha* in the family. Azad is about the tenth in paternal descent from Jamaluddin. Another learned forbear, Shaikh Mahammad, refused to do the enforced obeisance to Emperor Jehangir and suffered a four years' sentence in Gwalior Fort. For generations after that the Maulana's ancestors did not accept ' office ' until Shaikh Sirajuddin, a great grandfather, broke the family tradition by consenting to be appointed Chief Judge. It is a proud ancestry, an aristocracy of unbending dignity and learning.

Muhammad Khairuddin, Azad's father, was, like his sires, a learned divine of great repute ; his innumerable disciples came from every part of India. The events of 1857, however, rudely disturbed his peaceful serenity ; the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny unleashed a horribly vindictive repression in Delhi and thousands of innocent citizens ran for their very lives. Among them was Khairuddin and he eventually went to Mecca. His fame had travelled ahead. Sultan Abdul Majid of Turkey offered willing patronage and sponsored his authorship. At Mecca Khairuddin married the daughter (a scholar in her own right) of a theological divine and Abul Kalam was born of this distinguished union in September 1888, inheriting a double legacy of learning. Meanwhile, Khairuddin's numerous Indian

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disciples pressed for his return ; after oscillating for some years between Mecca and Bombay, he, finally, in 1898, went over and settled at Calcutta.

The boy Azad was not sent to school ; he studied at his father's feet. He was a prodigy and learnt with phenomenal rapidity. By fourteen he had mastered in four years a stiff ten-year course of languages, philosophy, logic, arithmetic, geography and history and had begun to teach them also to persons old enough to be his father. The pupil-teacher once lost his temper and hit an aged Pathan, who was oblivious of the subtle distinction between inductive and deductive logic ! The old fellow, bidden to 'get back home and eat grass,' went on hunger-strike for the day ; the abashed Maulana was roundly reproved by his father for this juvenile intolerance.

Stern Khairuddin was a model divine, the chief influence of Azad's boyhood. Of a severely retiring nature, his simplicity erred on the conservative. On the bare mattress with him had to sit nawabs and fakirs alike. He disliked modernity and set his face against Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's Muslim Reform movement. English and the modern sciences were not for his sons ; instead, Abul Kalam was sent to 'finish' at Al Azhar University, Cairo, Islam's intellectual metropolis. It was much later, at the age of twenty-one, that Azad started learning English, by himself, with a grammar and dictionary as helps !

The Maulana was a rhymster at fourteen ; Azad, no part of his name really, is a pseudonym of his early poetic period that has come to stay. The young Chatterton would

roll out couplet on couplet in the *mushairas* (poetic contests) and abase elder accomplished poets. While still a boy he edited 'Nerange Alam,' new signatures in Urdu poetry. Azad is a journalist born; his first venture, *Lisanul Sidq* (Voice of Truth) was achieved while he was yet a boy. Controversy was his sphere and he dealt hard, not budging the grating truth. The Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam of Lahore once invited the brilliant editor of *Lisanul Sidq* to deliver an address on 'The Rational Basis of Religion'; when the boy Azad rose to address the distinguished assembly of Muslim intellectuals they thought there was some mistake and the lad must be the son of the celebrated Maulana Abul Kalam Azad! The 'old head on young shoulders' then released a torrent of theological oratory and swept his audience off their feet.

On the threshold of youth Abul Kalam sensed the *Zeitgeist*. It was an age of questioning, of crumbling faith and hesitant hope. From Cairo he had witnessed the ideological unrest behind the Caucasus. In India, Bengal was a whirlpool of revolutionary upheaval and the Maulana was not entirely unaffected. But his preoccupations lay with the future of Islam and he severely examined his spiritual legacy. The old tenets seemed strangely extinguished. "I refused to be content with the legacy that family, education and environment had given me," he says, and the thirst of inquiry never left him. He quaffed all the poisons and likewise experimented on all the antidotes. Faith returned and with it a new belief, a new resolution to brave life's battle.

## III

But the India on which he went forth to play his part was a cockpit of discord, of communal bickerings, strenuously fanned by an official policy of *divide et impera*. The founding of the National Congress in 1885, the art of governance dictated, demanded an imperative counterpoise, and Government sedulously cultivated the Muslim nation of fifty millions. Lord Dufferin was a great statesman and did his little bit for the Empire. A Muslim counter-agitation to the Congress demand was deftly engineered. Then a man of destiny arose, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, and wrought an intellectual revolution among the Mussalmans. That revolution was thoroughly English and was easily lined up with Government. (Visiting England in 1869, Sir Syed wrote home this remarkable impression: "Without flattering the English, I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man"). Aligarh University, of Sir Syed's founding, became the focus of Muslim aspirations. Loyalty to Britain implied, as a corollary, opposition to the 'subversive' Congress. Thus was the Indian United Patriotic Association, precursor of the Muslim League, born, as a counterblast to Congress influence. Indeed, Lord Minto got up a 'command performance,' he received an 'influential deputation' headed by the Aga Khan who warned 'lest political concessions should be hastily made to the Hindus which would pave the way for the ascendancy of a Hindu majority

equally dangerous to the stability of British rule; and to the interests of the Mahomedan minority whose loyalty was beyond dispute.' We are now very familiar with the setting and language of this political triangle, with Britain as arbiter on top.

Abul Kalam, a whole-hearted admirer of Sir Syed's magnificent work, was nevertheless grieved that the great leader should have become a tool of British imperialism. While the patriotic Congress loudly declared for liberty, the Muslims, pledging loyalty, spoke with the voice of the rulers. It was a sorry part to play and the Maulana was appalled. He said: "I saw India, with all her many burdens, marching ahead to her future destiny. We were fellow-passengers in this boat and we could not ignore its swift passage through the waters." Then he launched a vigorous onslaught against contemporary Muslim politics. The weapon of the grand offensive was the famous *Al Hilal* (The Crescent). Started on June 1, 1912, Azad's Urdu weekly was an ordered crusade against Sir Syed's creed; it caused an explosion among Muslim ranks. Opposition was fierce and influential; even Hakim Ajmal Khan and Maulana Mahomed Ali, radicals both, raised voices of protest. But the tide was already turning. A new generation of Munsalmanas arose and broke away from the Aligarh School and looked up to the Congress. The Muslim *bourgeoisie* saw in Britain's foreign policy a deliberate hostility to Islam; they caught up the nationalist movement at high tide. *Al Hilal* took up the new challenge, fearlessly, unequivocally. Thinking Muslims paused and listened

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and understood. Maulana Shaukat Ali said : "Abul Kalam showed us the path of faith." The paper grew steadily in influence and circulation. It revolutionised Muslim thought ; it founded a style and set a mode. There was a war on and its unbridled popularity disturbed Government. The *Pioneer* wrote an 'inspired' editorial charging the Maulana with a pro-German outlook. It was amazed that 'the Government have managed to tolerate its writings.' Yet, for eighteen months afterwards the Government went on tolerating until they could tolerate no more. They forfeited the security of the paper, banned Azad's entry into the Punjab, the U. P. and Madras and expelled him from his own province of Bengal. Broken in health, he went to Ranchi to recuperate and Government thoughtfully interned him there. He turned the duress to good account ; there he wrote his invaluable memoirs, the *Tuzkira*, and a good part of his celebrated commentary on the Koran.

Then India stood on the top of fateful hours. The Rowlatt Bills, Jallianwallabagh and the Khilafat wrong had lashed the people into determined fury. Indian Muslims, angered over Britain's treatment of the Caliphate made common cause with the Congress. Hindu-Muslim unity seemed to be very much in the offing—Swami Shraddhananda, a Hindu *sanyasi*, was given a momentous reception at Delhi's Juma Masjid. Azad took the helm of the Khilafat movement : he towed the Muslim bark alongside Gandhi. The time was past for negotiations and deputations which served little purpose. Gandhi daringly

preached non-co-operation. But *non-violent* non-co-operation was something new ; it spiritualised politics. Azad, just out of prison, with his great learning and authority, provided the text and the sanction for the new strategy. He said : "Non-co-operation is a *jihad* which Islam has undertaken to offer. The whole history of Islam is full of such passive struggles. Non-co-operation has its sanction from Quranic injunction."

On a memorable day, January 18, 1920, Azad met Gandhi at Hakim Ajmal Khan's. Tilak was there, and the Ali brothers. There quietly, yet determinedly and fatefully, Gandhi fired his first non-violent salvo. Soon the sub-continent echoed with it ; there was a phenomenal response. Schools and colleges, councils and law courts were emptied. The spirit of the times called forth its leaders; the Nehrus, father and son, C. R. Das, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari and other distinguished names. They issued defiant manifestos. Government acted swiftly, ruthlessly. There was an orgy of arrests. C. R. Das declared : "It is the agony of bondage. The whole of India is a vast prison."

Azad, after a lingering trial, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. He made a historic statement, an oration deserving penal servitude for life, in Gandhi's phrase. This remarkable document, covering some thirty-three odd sheets, was later published as *Qual-i-Faisal*—a treatise on the philosophy of non-co-operation. Here are a few luminous extracts. Azad said he was proud to belong

to the galaxy of the world's *satyagrahis*—Christ, Socrates and Galileo. "When I ponder on the great and significant history of the convict's dook and find that the honour of standing in that place belongs to me to-day, my soul becomes steeped in thankfulness and praise of God." He perfectly understood Government's position—"no power would tamely submit to movements likely to bring about its own decline." He pleaded guilty ; he had dedicated his whole life to the cherishing and breeding of 'this holy discontent.' Liberty was the natural and God-given right of man—it is nobody's privilege to prescribe limits or apportion shares in the distribution of it—"no bureaucracy has the right to make the servants of God its own slaves." He concluded Socratically : "Mr. Magistrate, let us complete this memorable chapter soon, for the historian awaits us. The dock has fallen to our lot and to yours the magisterial chair. The time will come when a Higher Court will pass judgment upon us. That judgment will be final." The magistrate was on his trial.

Begum Azad sent this remarkable telegram to Gandhi : "Only one year—this is astonishingly below our expectations. If punishments and imprisonments are the reward for the service of the nation, you will agree that justice has not been done."

#### IV

With Gandhi in jail, a rot set in. The first impetus of the national movement ebbed away. Communalism reigned supreme and callous opportunists held the field. Government made good use of them. Hindu-Muslim tension



was at its highest and all the steady persevering work of 1919 seemed sadly wiped out. Religious fanaticism provoked fierce riots. The Press took sides and slung much religious mud. Gandhi came out of prison in January 1924 and was shocked. Communalism, incendiaryism, looting and destruction greeted him. He was openly assailed as the arch author of all this mischief. He did penance—he went on fast for twenty-one days. In a fit of concern the warring communities assembled in a Unity Conference to save the life of him who lay on the cross bearing all their sins. Azad lashed the communities into contrition. One leader reported: “he surpassed himself in the pathos and fervour of his eloquence and the generosity of his sentiment.” His reasoned appeal was the turning-point of the discussion. “You are one single brotherhood of people, the Cherisher and Protector of you all is One only, therefore do not divide yourself.” By the Mahatma’s bedside after the fast, the leaders, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Maulana Azad, among them, gathered and pledged their lives in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Back from prison in January 1923, the Maulana found Congress a divided house. There was a schism in its ranks; the ‘pro-changers,’ C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, keen to exploit a legislative programme, and the ‘no-changers,’ C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel, standing four square on Gandhi’s total boycott. To Azad, however, no political programme could be sacrosanct: ‘it had to be judged on its merits,’ pragmatically. At the special Delhi session of the Congress held under his

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presidentship, on September 15, 1923, Azad presented a compromise formula. Thus was the Congress parliamentary programme born. If it eventually fizzled out in a blaze of rhetorical fatuity and academic frustration, it at least stemmed the rot in Congress politics.

Meanwhile the Muslims drifted away from the Congress. The Ali Brothers frankly abandoned it, and took up opposed positions. There were other notable disasters. Dr. Ansari was dead, and also Hakim Ajmal Khan. But Azad was with Congress through thick and thin. He did not falter. He stood out lone, firm and undeterred, the embodiment of Congress leadership.

To Azad an Indian 'Ulster' is anathema. He said: "When they say we are two nations they beg the question. Eleven hundred years of common history have moulded us into a common nationality. Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. We must accept the logic of history." Azad is rather ashamed of the picture of Muslim India that Jinnah has drawn. The pity of it, this 'degrading' picture was being used to obstruct the freedom of India, he says.

The War into which the rulers pitted India, without so much as consulting her, knocked the lingering doubts of Congress. India *was* a dependency and independence seemed far away. Rule by ordinances nullified autonomy and the Congress; Ministries were promptly called out. Maulana Azad asked: "should we part with reason and reality so completely as not

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even to ask why this is being done and how this affects our destiny before plunging into this deluge of death and destruction?" Keenly and emphatically alive to the new perils to world peace and freedom, Azad did not forget the old. He hit out: "But while we were considering the dangers arising from Fascism and Imperialism, it was impossible to forget the older danger which has proved to be infinitely more fatal to the peace and freedom of nations. I refer to British Imperialism. We are not distant spectators of this Imperialism, as we are of the new reactionary movements. It has taken possession of our house and dominates us." Azad said so to Cripps. *Quit India*, he explained, was nothing more than transfer of power to India. But Cripps, tired and hustled, was in no mood to listen. He broke the straw and left abruptly. But *Government* furnished an answer—by the *coup d'état* of the night of August 3, 1942.

## V

Here is an Azad miscellany. A chain-smoker, he had just ten cigarettes in the case when taken to Alipore jail; he smoked two and handed the rest over to the jailor. C. R. Das, a co-prisoner, twitted him saying he should need them in jail. Azad replied: "Not until I am released." And he did *not* need them for the fifteen months he was in jail. This Azad story, Mahadev Desai points out, has parallels in De Valera and Vallabhbhai Patel—only these latter never smoked again!

## ABUL KALAM AZAD

An international figure in the Islamic world, Azad's friends are extra-Indian. He was in close touch with the Grey Wolf, Mustafa Kemal; other Turkish notables, Enver Pasha, Djaved Bay, Ahmed Reda and Dr. Selahuddin held the Maulana in utter regard. And Azad likes nothing so much as a Turkish bath!

Azad's monumental *Tarjamanul Quran*, a formidable undertaking, was like Carlyle's first *French Revolution* nearly destroyed—by an unwitting Government which seized the manuscript in his internment. This celebrated commentary on the Koran, since resurrected, is among the classics of Islamic literature, a thing that in itself entitles Azad to lasting fame. He is, incidentally, the creator of a new scientific method of the interpretation of Islam—the *Ihn-e-Kalam*. The Maulana interprets:

“It is not righteousness  
That ye turn your faces  
Towards East or West;  
But it is righteousness  
To believe in God.”

Says Rajagopalachari: “If at any time there should be a Congress of Religions and Cultures, meeting in one of the great halls of Akbar's Tomb in Agra, and if I participated in it, I would propose Maulana Abul Kalam to the presidential chair.”

Maulana Azad is the titular head of Congress in the direct tradition of Badruddin Tyabji, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari. He opposes, personally and institutionally,

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the reaction of the Muslim League. Children of Congress once and creatures of it—the Congress House in Bombay is, with a tragic irony, called Jinnah Hall—Jinnah, Choudhury Khaliq-ul-zaman, Hazrat Mohani, Fazlul Huq, these and many other such like, are to-day the sworn enemies of Congress, and therefore of the freedom of India. Their Pakistan is a pan-Islamic dream, cut off from India; it is a racial home-sickness yearning for religious contiguity. Azad, in spite of cultural roots in Turkey, opposes Pakistan—and he is what the Hindû appeasers in Congress are not, a *Muslim*; his verdict, on the side of Congress, must therefore be final.





## VALLABHBHAI PATEL

**S**ARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL, the Congress sledge-hammer—ruthless, ascetic and truculent—is ‘Stalin to Gandhi’s Lenin.’ This stolid Middle Temple barrister, with a tough bald skull and heavy-lidded eyes like Bill Powell’s, is made for wars and stratagems. A first-rate organising genius he is the creator of a gigantic political machine; he is the most feared and, so, the most hated man in Congress. He is the Congress King-Maker; he fired one Premier (Khare) and prevented another man (Nariman) from becoming one. He outlawed Bose. He is Gandhi’s Keeper of Conscience—the *primum mobile* of the Congress cosmos.

He is direct, abrupt—almost brutal in his abruptness. He is stern and taciturn; he can walk miles on end in utter silence, in self-centred thought. Someone described him as a Vesuvius covered over with snow. The man of action is writ large on the Sardar’s countenance, a curious facial blend of Lenin and Tilak—defiant high mastoids running into an uncompromising mouth.

Patel is no visionary; his contempt for theorists and idealists is open and avowed. To him Socialism and all other ‘isms,’ to which youth is heir to, are anathema, mischievous dogma. His one-track mind is focussed on one thing at a time; he has, therefore, an inveterate habit of getting things done. He is an organiser born, ‘the



Jim Farley of Congress,' with the crack organiser's ruthless efficiency.

He who is not with him is simply against him—a thing is either black or it is white: there is no middle way. Compromise is not in the dictionary of Vallabhbhai Patel. He hates half-measures; he goes the whole hog. He has made big decisions and has never regretted them. He is not swept off his feet; he goes forward with large, deliberate strides. His mind is empirical and rugged, it is not fundamental, subtle or profound. He is that strange paradox—a demagogue who is an autocrat, like Robespierre. He has learnt in the school of Gandhi the art of managing men; in Gujerat they dance to his tune. He is the voice of his people, his word is their gospel. Like a great general he commands willing obedience; he touches the hearts of men.

## II

Vallabhbhai's father, Zaverbhai, was a village Hampden; this intrepid peasant fought against Government in the Indian Mutiny and was promptly interned by the Holkar. Not much, curiously, is known about his mother. Vallabhbhai is the second of their illustrious progeny; the first was, of course, Vithalbhai Patel, the redoubtable President of the Indian Assembly. Born in Karamsad, a Gujerat village—Vallabhbhai does not remember his birth-date—he was, as a school boy, the despair of all his teachers, having to change school repeatedly, because no teachers could curb him.

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Once he nearly got his teacher cashiered for selling school belongings; another time, set to copy down an imposition for refractory behaviour, he roundly told his irate teacher that it was useless to write down repeatedly what one knew only so well. Like most intractable children he was precocious and developed in manhood an astounding perseverance—an undeterred pursuit of a single-minded purpose.

Matriculated, Patel settled down to the business of life; he qualified for the District Pleaders'hip and set up practice at Godhra. Part of his contempt for academic studies is explainable by their having been denied him—he was too poor to afford the unavailing luxury of a college education. But he wanted to become a barrister at any cost—young Gandhi had fled his parental home fired by the same ambition—and Vallabhbhai assiduously set about saving enough money, to go to England. When he did he made the coveted voyage, a mature and seasoned lawyer.

Seemingly indifferent, Patel's 'perseverance and industry are reserved for the most significant occasions;' he put in a record reading of seventeen hours a day in the library of the Middle Temple, covering eleven miles from his residence, to and fro, on foot. He did remarkably well at the Bar examination, standing first class first and securing a scholarship and feeship; indeed, one of the examiners was so much pleased with his performance that he gave him an unsolicited recommendation to the Chief Justice of Bombay. His purpose accomplished, Patel

sailed straight for India, not stopping to 'do' the Continent, for that was no part of his purpose. He has, like most men of action, a singular lack of intellectual curiosity.

### III

Vallabhbhai had a marked preference for criminal law; civil law, intricate and not quite so spectacular, did not interest him. He was at his best defending cases of murder, arson and dacoity. His name inspired terror among all ranks—even the judiciary were not exempt! The story is related that the Resident Magistrate's Court at Borsad was shifted to Anand to avoid Vallabhbhai and when he set up practice at Anand the Court was promptly shifted back again to Borsad.

Patel's nerves are filaments of steel; Mahadev Desai narrates this remarkable, almost incredible, incident: Once he was arguing an important case in court. A telegram was handed in to him. It announced the death of his wife. Patel read it, folded it and put it into his pocket and continued the interrupted argument as calmly and serenely as ever, as if nothing had happened. Here is another terrible anecdote. A surgeon suggested an operation and proceeded to administer chloroform; Patel would have none of it, saying, whatever the pain, he would endure, but no chloroform at any cost! The horrified doctor exclaimed: "I have never seen such a man in my life."

Legends have grown around Patel. The one, propagated by the *News Review*, of his ostentatiously sweeping

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public lavatories as President of Ahmedabad Municipality is perhaps apocryphal, as also his legendary innocence of Hindu scripture. The story of his shaving off his moustache because Gandhi criticised it ('but he grew it again later!') is of course nonsense.

### IV

In 1918 Gandhi, on his historic entry into Indian politics, found Gujerat in the throes of a devastating famine. There was a total failure of crops and the peasants clamoured for a suspension of the land tax. Government would not yield, and Gandhi, fresh from his South African experiments, counselled *satyagraha*. The people eagerly clutched at this straw and into the vortex of this peaceful campaigning Vallabhbhai was drawn. It is characteristic of Patel that he was, at first, totally unaffected by Gandhi's non-violent 'antics;' playing bridge unconcernedly at the Ahmedabad Club, he smiled cynically at the strange preaching of the South African barrister! But, as he looked on, pityingly, contemptuously, something kindled within him; Gandhi's indomitable purpose and tremendous self-assurance made a profound impress upon Patel, and he went all out for Gandhi. Thus was begun an unfaltering loyalty unique in the annals of political association.

First in the peasant *satyagraha*, then during the Ahmedabad mill-strike of 1918, Patel stood by Gandhi, admiring and learning. At first the millowners stoutly refused to augment the worker's wages, but Gandhi, then

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for the first time as so often afterwards, went on fast, and Capital, intimidated, hastily temporised, and Gandhi scored his first moral victory in India.

Patel saw and understood.

Followed Jallianwallabagh and the spiritual revolt of an unarmed people. Gandhi took the helm and mapped out mass resistance; the preliminary Congress session at Ahmedabad ratified his leadership. Patel was Chairman of the Reception Committee and converted the Congress from a debating assembly into a council of action. The delegates squatted under *khadi* tents and determined high issues. Bardoli, that heroic village on the map of India, was chosen to lead the nation-wide campaign. The stage was set and Gandhi sent his customary ultimatum to the Viceroy, Lord Reading. The zero hour approached. Then came a portent, as from the gods; the terrible happenings at Chauri Chaura upset everything, and Gandhi, with singular introspection, called off the campaign and went into voluntary exile.

In the Congress split after Gandhi's internment, Patel, with Rajagopalachari, led the 'no-changers' in firm opposition to C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru over Council-entry. Patel and Rajagopalachari (curious behaviour for a confirmed parliamentarian) resigned from the Congress Cabinet to carry out a 'constructive programme,' marking time. Civil resistance was dropped for the nonce, but righteous incidents such as the Nagpur flag *satyagraha* (which incidentally kept up Congress morale)

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threatened to precipitate a crisis, but Patel for once was conciliatory and Government allowed the incident to pass off without an incident.

### V

In Bardoli, Patel solved a local impasse : dacoities had been menacingly frequent there and Government, with a singular lack of humour, had inflicted punitive police on the distrait people. Patel reversed the joke against Government; he conclusively established that the rifles and bullets of the dacoits belonged to Government ! Patel scored a point and was rocketed into provincial eminence—Government, after a show of enquiry, wisely withdrawing the police.

It is significant of the times that, lacking a militant programme, Congress leaders should employ themselves with civic affairs. C. R. Das became Mayor of Calcutta and Vithalbhai Patel of Bombay, putting in distinguished terms; Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel became Presidents of the Allahabad, Patna and Ahmedabad Municipalities. But these were round men in square holes and were not over-happy with their innocuous responsibilities ; only Vallabhbhai lingered on till 1928—the others, thwarted, relapsed into their stormy elements.

The epic of Bardoli (1928), a Wst Tyler's peasants' revolt writ large, was staged under Patel's unflinching command—it gave Government quite a shake-up. The trouble arose over a threatened increase in the land-tax : the people were poorly off and opposed it bitterly. But

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Government was relentless, determined to collect the enhanced assessment. The indignant peasantry rallied and drew up in a phalanx of resistance, daring incredible privations.

K. M. Munshi, himself a *dramatis persona* in that grim tragedy, paints a lurid, terrific picture. Forty thousand men, women and children, with their beloved cattle, miserable and ulcerated, were herded for months in the darkness, the stench and the filth of common sheds, in a pathetic stay-in strike. Large fortunes were confiscated for ridiculously small assessments. The struggle was waged in the stinking misery of the western monsoon, the people's temper remaining top-notch.

The siege of Bardoli became an all-India affair; the Congress members of the Bombay Legislature resigned and Vithalbhai Patel, the formidable President of the Central Assembly, forced the issue. But Vallabhbhai was the central figure of the combat; his word was law. At last Government relented and offered terms, half-heartedly; Patel promptly rejected them. Then Gandhi intervened and drew up an acceptable formula calling off *satyagraha* pending a judicial enquiry. Agreement was reached eventually on the basis of a six-and-half per cent increase, and Patel had triumphed again.

## VI

A quinquennium of parliamentary adventures had thoroughly disillusioned Congress and it was a chastened

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session that met at Calcutta, Motilal Nehru presiding. Within the steel jackets of the Montford legislatures, Congress had frustrated itself; the occasional pyrotechnics, walks-out and token cuts, were hardly worth the candle, and Congress, repentant, went the Gandhian way. The Calcutta Congress formulated *Purna Swaraj* failing Dominion Status within a year. Nothing turned up, and the Lahore session went all out for complete independence.

The non-violent guns of Congress went into action and, in April 1930, Gandhi broke the salt laws, sowing, on his historic march to Dandi, the seeds of a gigantic agitation. The flood-gates of repression were opened. 'Now the die was cast and there was no turning back' was Patel's Order of the Day. He dared the Gujerat peasantry to defy confiscation; with a native logic he asked: "What is confiscation? Will they take away your lands to England?" Of course, Government could not, the simple people knew, and were galvanised into resistance. Patel was arrested and promptly sentenced. A gigantic Ahmedabad meeting, some 75,000 strong, resolved to 'go the same way that Vallabhbhai had gone,' and a no-tax campaign, the stormy sequel of Patel's arrest, raged in Gujerat.

Government reacted fiercely. Patel's eighty-year-old mother, Pattabhi Sitaramayya relates, was knocked down while cooking by a singularly unchivalrous police officer. But Government were frankly tired of it all and desired truce with Congress, and thanks to the embassy of



Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Dr. Jayakar, fruitful parleys led up to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Patel was not happy and said so as President of the Karachi Congress, following close on the short-lived truce.

## VII

After Bardoli Patel's political credit stood high and the presidential honour was an index of his dominating position in Indian politics. He was nearest the hub of Congress, Gandhi. "You have called a simple farmer to the highest office to which an Indian can aspire," Vallabhbhai declared with embarrassing modesty. Symbolically the Karachi Congress was a simple show, sans pomp and ceremony. Sombre clouds had lowered over the session. Motilal Nehru was dead and there was public resentment, if not sympathy, at the unrelenting executions of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. A war-weary Congress was settling down to peace-time stock-taking. Of course, there was the Gandhi-Irwin truce in force, but Patel made no bones about its ultimate outcome. He reiterated the unwhittled Congress demand for complete independence; he simply was not interested in legislative honours—"the peasantry do not understand them." The Karachi Congress made history by ratifying the resolution on Fundamental Rights, an Indian 'Rights of Man.' Congress was in no mood for terms. Gandhi, its unaccredited envoy to St. James, knew that. He set sail for England to attend the Round Table Conference with the 'blessings' of Congress. The voice of India had gone forth.

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While yet the Conference debated the Indian question and Gandhi put his historic case for India before it, there were flagrant breaches of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The truce could not last long and there were clashes in the United Provinces, in Bengal, in the Frontier and in Bardoli. The Gujerat stalemate was the last straw. Government put through an 'enquiry' into the alleged police excesses in Bardoli, but Patel and his famous counsel, Bhulabhai Desai, felt that the mutilated inquisition was an eye-wash, a very one-sided affair. Supremely satisfied that 'further prosecution of the enquiry was futile,' Patel withdrew, and on November 13, 1931 sent the fateful cable to Gandhi in England that snapped the final link in the chain of the short-lived truce.

So, back again to *satyagraha* and the wilderness, precious years spent in sickening, neurotic jails. Vallabhbhai had drawn up a testament of his succession before his arrest; by a singular fortune he was lodged in Yeravada jail to keep Gandhi company. Of that close comradeship of sixteen months Gandhi has recorded this gushing praise of Patel: "The affection with which he covered me recalls to me that of my own dear mother. I never knew him to possess motherly qualities." Patel should have blushed at that—if he could. He lingered longer in jail than his chief; a providential nasal trouble compelled his release in July 1934, a year after civil resistance had officially ceased,

Released, President Patel found Congress a house of many counsels. The Socialist minority had gone to an

extreme left, thoroughly disgusted with the 'go-slow' Right; Pandit Malaviya and M. S. Aney had cut out a Nationalist Party on the issue of the Communal Award, carrying Hindu Bengal with them; the weary majority, backed by Dr. B. C. Roy and Bhulabhai Desai, called loudly for constitutional pastures for what the Reforms were worth; and there was, lastly, the little changeless group that has always stood by Gandhi. But the criticism against the Gandhian way grew steadily in volume and strength; Patel shrewdly sensed the rift in the Congress reed. With astonishing courage (for a self-admitted 'blind follower of Gandhi') Patel declared: "It is time for Gandhi to retire." But Gandhi did not retire, he simply was not allowed to. He has always been there in the firmament of Congress, now and again perhaps screened by some fleeting cloud, but certain to launch out again, master of all. Indeed, the Bombay Congress (1934) proclaimed Gandhi's unchallenged leadership, thrusting it upon him.

## VIII

The Lucknow session of 1936 pitched Congress into the vortex of election forays. The Congress Parliamentary Board was set up with Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel as 'party bosses,' but undoubtedly Patel did all the bossing. There was a whirlwind countrywide campaign, and there was a staggering response, Congress sweeping the polls in eight out of the eleven provinces. Patel naively told the electorates, 'a vote for Congress is a vote for Gandhi,' in a language

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they could understand. The paths to the Legislatures were paved with Congress good intentions, and, although Patel himself set little store by the 'loaves and fishes of office,' a power-hungry Congress voted solidly for them.

The whirligig of time brought in its revenges; a party perpetually in opposition, for the most part in jails, prepared strenuously to shoulder the responsibilities of His Majesty's Government. But H.M.'s Governors had special responsibilities also under the constitution, hedged in by checks and safeguards, and they stood by their inflexible rights. There occurred a stalemate, and the Congress majorities, stepped off and let the Interim Ministries have their day. They had their day and ceased to be. Government, at last and without option, threw up the sponge, resigning themselves to the rule of Congress, on its own terms.

In the history of parliamentary government there is hardly anything to match the incredible transformation of Congress on the Treasury Benches; by a strange irony, the men and women who had broken laws now grimly set about administering them. By all accounts, they did remarkably, astoundingly well. But the course of Congress Governments never did run smooth: there was at every turn some constitutional tug, some altercation with authority stretched almost to breaking point, and then miraculously saved from the abyss of disaster.

There was a battle royal over the repatriation of politicals in the Andamans. They had gone hunger-striking, but Delhi stoutly refused to release them. There was a

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first-class constitutional stalemate, the Ministries in U. P. and Bihar walking out in a huff. Vallabhbhai clinched the issue addressing the Haripura Congress : " If we cannot release fifteen prisoners what is this so-called provincial autonomy ? " Patel knew his strength and talked of ' action,' of Congress retaliation. The bubble of autonomy had been pricked and it seemed in imminent danger of bursting. But Government were wise, before the event ; the prisoners were released and a Congress rupture was averted—for the time.

## IX

Of all the Congress High Command—an appellation labelled on the Working Committee by a sinister analogy with Fascist methods—Patel was alone the Fuehrer of the Congress parliamentary regime, both *de jure* and *de facto*. He wielded immense power and directed, solo, the knotty administrations of his immense jurisdiction. Gunther calls him the Jim Farley of Congress—a diluted understatement of Patel's prowess. The Ministries danced to his tune and quaked at his name. No wonder Patel was magnified into a political ogre.

Prohibition, Trade Disputes Acts, Tenancy Legislation, Agriculturists' Welfare, States People's Agitation—all these and more he dauntlessly pushed through, spite of vested interests, with ruthless competence. The Congress steam-roller was on the march—there was no stopping it. In Bombay there was an outcry against Prohibition, newspapers, tradesmen and addicts putting up an intemperate opposition. There were demonstrations galore.

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Patel did not budge an inch. With monumental courage, on August 1, 1939, he led the inaugural procession. Bombay went dry with not a tear shed. At Rajkot, Vallabhbhai battled manfully against an almost medieval despotism. There he met his equal in Durbar Virawala, a Rasputin of a man who put through an infamous drama of dark and defiant intrigue.

Patel attained the very water-mark of unpopularity in Congress by his heartless purges in its high ranks. Robespierre could hardly have made himself more obnoxious. First, Patel's guillotine fell on K. F. Nariman, the noted Bombay leader, and then on Dr. N. B. Khare, then Premier of the Central Provinces. The incidents created a sensation. The *News Review* reported in characteristic journalese: "broom-wielder Patel raised the dust even in the far away corridors of Whitehall's India Office. Wires buzzed with reports that he was sweeping along the way of Fascism." Patel was violently assailed, but he marched on.

Nariman, before his phenomenal dethronement, was the undisputed leader of the Bombay Congress, a popular idol. But he had fallen out with Vallabhbhai, and when Congress took office in Bombay, Nariman was simply passed over, and solicitor B. G. Kher, 'a dark horse,' was pitchforked into onerous leadership. Nariman, infuriated, kicked out, arraigning Patel; Congress took up the challenge and conducted an inquiry, with Gandhi and Bahadurji as arbiters, and Nariman was rusticated; school-boy fashion, demoted, pilloried and outlawed. The affair left a bitter taste and Congress lost a gallant fighter.

The Khare purge was, of course, more sensational. The redoubtable surgeon had sacrificed a roaring practice to head the Central Provinces Ministry and receive 'an occasional scolding from Sardar Patel.' Dr. Khare was unfortunate in his Cabinet: there were perpetual differences and he was 'a dangerous man to cross.' His colleagues, Ravishankar Shukla, Premier after him, and Dwarka Prasad Misra, gave him little rest and he would fain have thrown them overboard. Dr. Khare, accordingly, engineered a remarkable *coup d'etat*. He resigned precipitately, intending to force, according to convention, the dissolution of his Cabinet. But Shukla and Misra refused to oblige and Khare was baulked of his fond hope of re-constituting a Cabinet after his heart's desire. Congress was furious and Vallabhbhai sternly demanded an explanation. Khare was unceremoniously 'fired' and the Congress stood solidly by Patel. Feelings ran high and a section of the Press kept up a ballyhoo, denouncing 'Fascist' Patel. But the steam-roller moved on; presently and inevitably, it encountered Subhas Chandra Bose.

Bose's hatred of Patel was a mixture of ideological antipathy and personal bitterness. Bose's violent nationalism, improved by continental excursions, raced leagues ahead of the trotting Congress. Avowedly disgusted, he talked about dictatorial 'technique;' Patel simply practised it. Bose was forestalled. Personally, he had a grouse against the High Command—and the High Command *was* Patel—for backing high-handedly Pattabhi Sitaramayya in the presidential contest against himself,

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although unsuccessfully. But the bitter gall rankled and when at Calcutta, amidst ugly scenes, Bose was relieved of the Presidential office, he walked out of Congress and turned his steps elsewhere. And Patel was the vicarious target of all this tumultuous fury ; afraid to strike at Gandhi, incensed Bengal attacked the Iron Dictator, hurling vituperation and calumny against him. But Vallabhbhai bore the brunt of it all, nothing daunted ; Bose was knocked out in the final round.

## X

With the loss of Bose and of Bengal after him, Congress was a split house ; the War had created an anomalous (for Congress), but poignant, situation. Gandhi, of course, was cent-per-cent non-violent (Ghaffar Khan went the whole hog with him) and even gratuitously exhorted the Poles not to resist the German onslaught. Nehru, wedded to China, was on the top of a wave that neither way inclined. Azad, with refreshing adaptability, lined up with the *Zeitgeist*. Non-violence, as a creed, had been shelved for the nonce, and the erstwhile pacifist Congress went so far belligerent as to promise co-operation in Britain's war effort if Government pledged Indian self-determination.

For Patel the change-over was logical, almost irresistible. Had he not as dictator of the Congress Ministries sanctioned violence ? To quell intransigence, non-violent Premiers had called out very violent soldiery on occasions and were frank about it. But Government were simply



not interested in the Congress climb-down, and Gandhi resumed command on his own conditions. His plan of individual *satyagraha* almost misfired; Government stole the thunder by coolly ignoring, after demonstrational arrests, Congress' symbolic law-breaking. One by one incarcerated Congressmen were released, and as Japan pushed closer towards India, Cripps was rushed with a last-minute formula and rushed back again on the failure of his ill-starred mission.

Gandhi then hurled his epochal 'Quit India' demand. The period of parleys with Britain had suddenly, decisively and incurably, lapsed as if by some rule of political limitation. Congress had served notice on Government preparatory to going to court. There were warnings and veiled threats. There was open talk of struggle. Patel, at an Ahmedabad meeting, cryptically declared that the fight would be 'short and swift.' Government were startled into alertness.

In the twilight of the terrible and ghastly sequel of disturbances, much has been read into that Delphic prophecy, but Patel must have an answer. On the fateful night of August 8, 1942 he made a thunderous speech at the Bombay meeting of Congress lashing his audience with invective and righteous fury. Japan he denounced as relentlessly as he disowned Britain. "If the Allies were thinking that they could fight their enemies from India, without the co-operation of forty millions of her people, they were grievously mistaken." Even as these words were being uttered, the manacles of Government

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were fastening on Congress ; that night Patel was arrested in the general round-up of Congress leaders.

### XI

Patel's empirical mind functions tangentially. He would, for instance, 'present the Muslims with a *swadeshi* fountain-pen and let them write out their demands, and he would just endorse them.' Of course, Jinnah will not just write with this gratuitous pen—he sees it is *Congress*.' Patel will have no Socialist barking in his native ground: "I will not tolerate their interference in Gujerat where I have dedicated my life to bring *Swaraj*." Whatever the Socialists might achieve, it would not be *Swaraj* to Patel: he detests their ideological poaching. At Haripura he growled: "Let me make it clear that we have tolerated you for two years but we shall no longer tolerate you." Young Socialists, hot colts, protested that with such a background of suspicion and hostility, it was impossible to work together. Jayaprakash Narain, their intrepid Chief, said so in a dignified reply. And so the Congress 'Left' swung further away, cursing Patel—he is the stick the 'Right' has to beat the Socialists with !

And Patel has his own ideas of what 'real' Socialism should be: "True Socialism lies in the development of village industries. We do not want to reproduce in our country the chaotic conditions prevalent in the Western countries consequent upon mass production." To Nehru all this is gibberish, 'a strange misreading of the situation—the fault obviously is not in the production but in the folly and inadequacy of the distributive system.'

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Vallabhbhai is not, as commonly supposed, implacable. Gandhi says Patel 'showed a remarkable comprehension of the difficulties of Government.' But he is cocksure and precipitates action, although a great deal of organised strength lies behind it. His thunders are not prefaced by lightning signals—they announce themselves, like V-2, by terrific explosions. He is the Congress Chief of Staff; he 'rams the line.' He will blast the 'enemy' by a withering phrase. Are the people afraid? Why, says Patel, 'it is Government that have cause to fear.'





## RAJENDRA PRASAD

**R**ABU RAJENDRA PRASAD is the unquestioned leader of Bihar; the people understand him, they know that he has profound sympathy with them. They know he is of the purest motives and presents the highest example of public integrity. Peasant-like, his tall gaunt stature emaciated by chronic asthma and political privation, Rajendra Prasad is a pathetic figure of rare moral force and grandeur. That earnest eager face, from which the eyes look out with the simple directness of truth, is remembered ever after. He stands in the front rank of India's genuine patriots; he is among the nearest to Gandhi and of the very earliest to imbibe his real message. Unsophisticated, his life is a grand essay in self-renunciation and austere simplicity. The political surrender of this towering Bihari, a first-class intellectual, eminent lawyer, administrator, educationist and superb mass organiser is a landmark in the Mahatma's Indian epoch. In outstanding ability and energy, in absolute straightness and complete devotion to India's freedom-struggle, he has hardly a peer among the Congress hierarchy. The name of Rajendra Prasad has a magic and potency which only the people of India can understand.

### II

Rajendra Prasad was born on December 3, 1884, just a year before the Indian National Congress was conceived, of a very respectable Kayastha family in Ziradei,

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Saran district, Bihar. The youngest-born of his parents, Rajendra lost his father, Munshi Mahadeo Sahay in 1907 and the bulk of his upbringing fell upon his elder brother, Mahendra Prasad. Mahendra was father to his brother in spirit and in deed, and was himself a notable public worker, with an excellent record in co-operation and banking. An ineffable tie of warm gratitude bound Rajendra to his brother.

The boy went to school at Chapra and topped the list at the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University—the first Bihari to achieve that distinction. He has always been first-class first. Of young brilliant Rajendra, the *Hindustan Review* then wrote with uncanny prescience that he would live to occupy a seat on the Bench of the High Court of his province and become a President of the Indian National Congress! The judicial honour, indeed, was offered to him on more than one occasion, but he elected to follow a more various career at the Bar.

From the Presidency College, Calcutta, Rajendra Prasad was at the top again in the Intermediate and in the B.A. of Calcutta University. After an M.A. in English he went over for a while to Muzaffarpur as a Professor in the Greer College, but returned to Calcutta to practise law. For one of his academic distinction, he was no book-worm. Keenly interested in the student movement, he founded in 1902 the Bihari Club, precursor of the Bihari Students' Conference which did much excellent work. The partition of Bengal had thrown the country into a tumult of

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unrest, and the cult of *swadeshi* and boycott gave a new direction to political agitation. India was stirred and young Rajendra plunged into the flood, heart and soul.

### III

Lured by his devotion to public affairs, Gokhale in 1910 invited Rajendra Prasad to join the Servants of India Society. Nothing was nearer his heart and the unique letter he wrote to his brother is at once a document of almost filial devotion and a testament of high-souled faith. "It may be ungrateful on my part to leave you in difficulty and embarrassment. But I propose to you to make a sacrifice in the cause of 300 millions" wrote the young patriot. "You, who have been forming high hopes, will see your hopes dashed down in a moment. But in this transitory world all passes away—wealth, rank, honour." He added: "Let us then not despise poverty. The greatest men of the world have been the poorest, at first the most persecuted and the most despised. But the scoffers and the persecutors are gone into dust, no more to rise, no more to be heard of, while the persecuted and the despised live in the memory and the heart of millions. If I have had any ambition in my life it has been to be of some service to the country." Each one of these remarkable words Babu Rajendra Prasad will emphatically affirm to-day. He has more than lived his noble ideals. But his brother was loath to let him go.

At the Calcutta High Court he was acknowledged a rising junior during the five years that he practised there; then he shifted over to his own native Patna when



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the new High Court was established there in 1916. Meantime, in 1915, he had as usual stood first-class first in the M.L. Exam. At Patna success was swift and he built up a large and lucrative practice. With his growing clientele, and with the Bar and Bench alike his reputation stood at top-mark. It was actually in 1928, although as a student he very much wished to, that Rajendra Prasad crossed the seas to instruct in an important Burma appeal before the Privy Council. Then he made quite a tour of Europe and met Romain Rolland. At a public meeting in Gratz, Austria, he was almost murderously assaulted for pacifist propaganda. He escaped, luckily, with severe injuries however.

The profession of law is a jealous mistress, but education soon claimed Rajendra Prasad's love. In 1916 a very reactionary Patna University Bill had been introduced by Sir C. Sankaran Nair, then Education Member of the Government of India ; but Rajendra Prasad, as the Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Association, sternly opposed the noxious measure and got it substantially modified. When the University was founded in 1917 he was ready to guide it, in the Senate and in the Syndicate. He was a keen advocate of cheaper education, of a shorter university course and of the provincial vernaculars as the media of instruction. Years later, he achieved somewhat of this educational idealism when he established the Bihar Vidyapith. The National University boasted some 650 affiliated institutions and 62,000 students ! Government, later, visited vicarious punishment on the seat of learning,

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closing it down and seizing its buildings as a reprisal against civil resistance.

But more momentous events were happening on the Indian scene.

### IV

In 1916 Gandhi made his excursion into Indian politics. He forthwith made history in Bihar by the Champaran *Satyagraha* ; he at once extended the sphere of Congress activity to the proportions of a mass movement. An insistent public had demanded an enquiry into the conditions of the miserable ryots of the Champaran indigo plantations ; on April 15, 1917 Gandhi arrived at Muzaffarpur to make a personal investigation. For defiance of a notice to quit he was arrested and prosecuted, but the notice was soon withdrawn. Along with Brijkishore Prasad, 'the soul of public work in Bihar,' Rajendra Prasad stood by the Mahatma with a singular devotion. They were 'a matchless pair.' The enquiry evoked unprecedented response ; the Government promptly appointed a Commission, with Gandhi himself on it, to investigate the agrarian discontent. The Committee found for the ryots and the Champaran Agrarian Act, passed in December 1917, removed many of the old 'scandals.'

For the first time in many decades, the Indian people found a voice ; for Rajendra Prasad this first association with the Mahatma was a baptism in politics. To him, Gandhi's greatest contribution to the politics of Man lay

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in this—'he has given us and the world a moral substitute for war.' Gandhi had lifted politics from the plane of sophistication and untruths, and by truth and non-violence he had pointed the way to the deliverance of the world.

The dark events of 1919 were, however, the last straw. Roused to indignant fury, the country flared up in a total agitation against the Rowlatt Bills, the tragic aftermath of Indian war effort. Rajendra Prasad at once pledged himself to break the 'unrighteous' laws and headed the movement in Bihar. Then followed the ugly happenings of that besmirched epoch—the Punjab 'atrocities.' Indian Muslim opinion, shocked at the Khilafat wrong, veered and sailed with the Congress. In a turning speech at a Patna Khilafat meeting, Rajendra Prasad declared for Gandhi and non-co-operation. He gave up his extensive practice and resigned from the University, even before the Nagpur Congress (1920) officially ratified the non-co-operation programme. It is said that when Rajendra Prasad renounced his practice he had but Rs. 15 remaining in his bank account; the man who had earned thousands had given bountifully in public charity. Since then he has not looked back. He remains to-day, as ever, the inveterate protagonist of direct action, of non-co-operation and passive resistance; for 'that alone will bring India to her destined goal.' He was, it is true, one of the three zonal 'party bosses,' who controlled the Congress legislative programme; but it was from a sense of discipline and his heart was not in it.

On the afternoon of January 15, 1934 there occurred in Bihar a terrible earthquake, an unprecedented cataclysm. Vast areas were in ruins and the cloven earth showed deep fissures and craters, graves alike of buildings and human lives. The miserable province was one ghastly debris, wrought by some illimitable cruel monster. The people were convulsed by an indescribable agony and looked pitifully for succour. The relief work, gigantic in scope, taxed Government initiative severely and a lot more remained to be done. Living people lay buried for days and days. Jawaharlal Nehru indulged in some well-meaning criticism of official slackness and brought down upon himself the ire of the ruling gods.

Rajendra Prasad was still in jail, a broken man, when the earthquake occurred. He was only released two days later on the recommendation of a special medical board. Forthwith, reckless of failing health, he plunged into the herculean task of organising relief and worked without respite, nightly and hourly. That was after he had served his third sentence of fifteen months! He was the hub of non-official relief which came flooding in from all over India. Of course, the Viceroy issued an official appeal, backed by his great prestige and tremendous influence. But the beloved tribune of Bihar cast on the vast multitudes a magic spell. He worked a miracle; single-handed he collected the phenomenal sum of twenty-nine lakhs, a triumph of organisation. That was nearly quite as much as the Viceroy could do in the panoply of all his

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authority. It was a crowning achievement, an index also of Congress influence. Yet the Bihar relief was a collective venture of ungrudging assistance, spontaneously given and warmly accepted, by workers of every political creed.

Picture the disaster. The area of seismic destruction covered 30,000 square miles (the greatest recorded in history), affecting a population of one and a half crores. Ten lakhs of houses were irrecoverably destroyed, burying 30,000 lives. Eight lakhs of fertile land became one arid desert of sand, disgorged from the embowelled earth. Shortly, Nature smote again: roaring floods inundated whole districts—the craters spat out a terrible pestilence. The Bihar Central Relief Committee, immured Congressmen most of them, battled heroically against the elemental furies.

The shining magnet of this corporate endeavour was Babu Rajendra Prasad.

The schemes of reconstruction, he made it clear to Government, were not merely to be tinkered with. "They require a thorough knowledge of the strength and weakness in the character and culture of our people. Above all, they require a long vision and a determined will and a band of sacrificing and devoted workers."

On May 31, 1935 came the Quetta earthquake with catastrophic violence. Quetta city was wiped out and over 25,000 perished. Rajendra Prasad, then Congress

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President 'and the man who knew more about earthquake relief work than almost any other person in India,' applied to go to Quetta and help in relief; he was simply not permitted to! Nor was Gandhi allowed. It was strange, passing strange; but Government had their prestige to consider. The bureaucracy cannot be outdone. Indian newspapers had their securities forfeited for printing articles on Quetta! The miserable city was fenced off. No Congress leaders for Baluchistan, virgin soil for contingent agitation!

## VI

John Gunther calls Rajendra Prasad the heart of the 'Congress triumvirate'—Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad are the other two, the 'ruthless fist and spiritual enlightenment.' This unkempt peasant 'has great personal quality.' He sees things in their truth. The story is retailed that once a British official delegation, passing by him in jail, remarked with monumental obtuseness—'obviously a criminal type.' Austerely simple, he travels third class. An intellectual aristocrat, he is the homeliest of speakers, reaching the mass mind by a fundamental directness and simplicity. He has a phenomenal memory, almost Macaulayan, and he speaks seven languages. His mind is a reservoir of learning; yet his intercourse is like a sparkling trickle, mellifluent and unadorned. There is little of the lawyer about him; he smacks of the earth, the soil. Pandit Nehru finds him 'a little limited in outlook, somewhat unsophisticated from the point of view of the modern world.' He has few enemies; none but he.

could have dared to take the Congress helm in a tumultuous Bengal, irate over the political dethronement of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1939. No doctrinaire controversialist, he is the fairest of opponents, elastic and understanding.

On December 3, 1944 Rajendra Prasad was sixty. India celebrated the diamond jubilee while the sexagenarian patriot languished in Bankipore Jail. There was a chorus of thanksgiving. Rajagopalachari brilliantly summed up the apostle as 'the first gentleman in India.'

Presiding over the Bombay session of Congress in 1934, Rajendra Prasad said prophetically: "The price for freedom must be paid before we can get it. The task we have taken upon ourselves is great and glorious. It requires inexhaustible patience and unflinching determination; world forces are helping us and, above all, God is with us in this great epic struggle of an unarmed people fighting with the weapons of *Satyagraha*, Truth and Non-violence a most powerful Government armed cap-a-pie and equipped with the latest engines of destruction devised by science and human ingenuity. For us there is no turning back. The goal is clear. It is nothing short of independence."

Independence to Rajendra Prasad is the natural outcome of all that the Indian freedom movement has stood for. It means not only the end of the exploitation of one country by another, but also of one part of the people by another part. Independence is not Hindu

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Raj; neither will it be the Raj of the Muslim League. It is not mere Chauvinism or insular nationalism; it is a free and friendly association with other nations for the mutual benefit of all. "It forebodes evil to none, not even to those exploiting us." The author of this declaration of faith might have been Gandhi—so complete is their ideological identification.

To Rajendra Prasad, non-violence in Indian politics, like honesty in business, is the best policy. He does not look to the present wolf-and-the-lamb international politics to work out India's salvation. Nothing like international morality or conscience exists to-day, he says, 'nothing that can prevent the most cruel and blatant wrong that one nation can inflict on another.' There is but one way out, available to India: "I believe it is possible to achieve independence with non-violence; and it is equally possible to retain it with non-violence." This pacifist faith rings pathetic in a downright world, girded up in arms—men like Gandhi and Rajendra Prasad are *postscripts* to the deluge.

In a brilliant thesis on 'Schemes for Dividing India, Rajendra Prasad explodes Pakistan and its ilk. Denouncing them as 'historically wrong and utterly devoid of any hope for the future, he asks spiritedly: "Why should Muslims of India cease to be Indians? Why shouldn't they have attachment to the land of their birth without tearing it away from the rest to which it has been inextricably attached by God Who made the Indian 'sub-continent' "



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one whole, in His Infinite Wisdom ? ” The whole theory of the protection of minorities, he says, has an absolutely wrong psychological basis ; ‘ the only protection that will really work is that afforded by goodwill among communities and those nobler instincts of man of which no community is devoid.’ This philosophical solution, somewhat like Shelley’s outlawry of Evil, is typical of the man who, as President of the Congress in 1935, proposed terms to Jinnah in all earnestness ; Jinnah, banking on their rejection by Congress, toyed with the ‘sporting offer,’ sullenly withdrawing, and when it suited him, in 1937, used it as a missile against the Congress drive for Muslim Mass Contact. But Rajendra Prasad suavely reiterated the gentleman’s agreement, but Jinnah slammed the open door.

## VII

Here is a footnote.

In the Milky Way of Congress, Rajendra Prasad dwells apart. If Bihar were a kingdom he would be offered the throne by his loving people. Yet he wears the crown, but the thorns eat deeper into the marrow of his austere being. Contemporary India has not thrown up a gentler voice of human compassion. In another age the Apostle of *Ahimsa* trod the same ground as Prasad, consecrating it. History echoes.





## ABDUL GHAFFAR KHAN

**I**N the varied history of India's freedom movement, there is scarcely anything more striking and fascinating than the emergence and rise to influence of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. To his turbulent people of the Frontier, this 'King among men by stature and dignity of bearing,' carries a new message of peace and hope. He has quaffed deeply and truly of Gandhi's non-violent philosophy.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan is no politician. 'A tall, straight man, straight in body and mind,' he has an empirical grip on issues. Of few words, he does not talk or fuss about; he goes at things simply and directly. Freedom he understands, but it is the freedom of action, not the constitutional mirage of political manoeuvring. Action, non-violent action, is with him the condition of all achievement, and without organisation, he knows, there can be no effective action. He is a marvellous organiser; the *Khudai Khidmatgars*, his gallant and indomitable following of non-violent Pathans, are a living monument of his organising drive.

"I am a born soldier and will die one" he declared, and refused to be elected President of the Indian National Congress. A scion of the Frontier aristocracy, he has made unprecedented sacrifices and has endured severe travail. "One learns a good deal, Mahatmajji, in the school of suffering," he told Gandhi. A deep religious tie binds the

two men. There is no more powerful advocate of the pure theory of non-violence, 'not as a policy but as a creed,' in the Congress than the Khan. This first among the 'Servants of God' lives a severely ascetic life, fakir-like. Bestaffed, he prefers to do his immense travelling afoot, shunning a conveyance. He is a non-smoker and has given up his last luxury—tea. His very humility and selflessness evoke and command the unwavering devotion of his vast following. Leadership to him is the highest service.

Gandhi was attracted to the Khan by his 'transparent sincerity, frankness and utmost simplicity.' His profound spirituality is not a narrow creed but a deep universal religion; it is a surrender to God. Beneath all this enormous self-restraint and undeterred purpose there is a personality of tender warmth and singularly disarming charm. Suffering has carved deep furrows on his face and mind, but this cheerful uncomplaining man has not a trace of bitterness.

## II

Among his people Ghaffar Khan's popularity is phenomenal; with glowing affection they call him 'Fakhr-e-Pathan' (Pride of Pathans) and 'Gandhi-e-Sarhad' (Frontier Gandhi). In the district round his own home he is known as *Badsha*—King! Thousands speed to his bidding, and he is a hard task-master. Of a rigid, inflexible purpose, he will not compromise a principle, because thereby 'you not only compromise truth, but you compromise self-respect.' He will not have cant or show; he has always shunned the footlights. Most of his active political life has

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been spent in prison ; in the intervals of freedom he appears rarely, outside his own province, at Congress gatherings.

But the Khan has been much misunderstood and misrepresented. Bigoted co-religionists have heaped calumny on him and reviled his very universality. But he has always been the Quranic tree that yields fruit to those who throw stones at it. "At the back of our quarrels," he laments, "is the failure to recognise that all faiths contain enough inspiration for their adherents."

Chagrined officials have severely impeached his credentials. Sir Michael O'Dwyer, in an article in the *Morning Post*, savagely denounced the Khan as "the daring Afghan revolutionary, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who is known as the Frontier Gandhi, though he openly sneers at Gandhi's non-violence cant, and makes no secret of his intentions to expel the British and organise on the North-West Frontier a Communist republic on the Soviet lines." That was the most unkindest cut of all. Non-violence to the Khan is no cant to be sneered at: "my non-violence has almost become a matter of faith with me," he proclaimed in 1931. "I believed in Gandhiji's *ahimsa* before. But the unparalleled success of the experiment in my province has made me a confirmed champion of non-violence. God willing, I hope never to see my province take to violence. It may be I may fail and a wave of violence may sweep over my province. I will then be content to take the verdict of Fate against me."

That the mighty Pathan could acknowledge unruffled, with a smiling, peaceful courage, the *lathi* blows of

overweening authority was simply magnificent; it was a revolution in Frontier manners. The 'murderous' province of 'punitive expeditions' and 'usurious money-lenders' took on quite another hue. Astounding tales of non-violent heroism sent a thrill through the borderside. Haji Shah Nawaz Khan, a cousin of the Khan, imprisoned under the Security section and constrained to furnish security, simply killed himself 'for the disgrace he had brought upon the family.' Syed Abdul Wahab Badshah, a noted zamindar and religious head, was sentenced under the Security section; his dying father paid the security to have a last look at the son. But the Syed, indignant with shame, shot himself dead. It was a new Frontier and it was the quiet, persevering creation of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

### III

The Khan comes of the well-known clan of Mohamad-zai Pathans, a landed aristocracy. Born in 1890, he is younger by seven years than his brother, Dr. Khan Sahib, the Congress ex-Premier of the Frontier Province. Their father, Khan Sahib Bahram Khan was *Khan* (chief) of Utmanzai village, picturesquely situated on the River Swat, some twenty miles off Peshawar. It is a wild mountain scenery of exquisite beauty, of sugar-cane fields and rich, creamy milch-kine. Of his father, Ghaffar Khan speaks with glowing affection. Unlettered, Bahram Khan was a man of deep spiritual faith and transparent sincerity. He was the people's trusted bank and his word was as good as his bond. He knew no revenge and was of boundless.

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charity. Approaching ninety, the old man followed Ghaffar Khan to jail over the Rowlatt Bills agitation, heedless of a menacing *jirga* (deputation). He was told his son would be shot, but he courted imprisonment with joy. Bahram Khan died in 1926, aged 95.

The Frontier Province had long lain away from the cultural wake of the British regime and the new English schools were taboo. But the father was a reformer and sent his sons to the Edwardes Mission School at Peshawar. Eyebrows were lifted. The splendid Christian example of Rev. E. F. E. Wigram, the headmaster, fired young Ghaffar Khan with a unique devotion and sense of service. Khan Sahib matriculated and after a year at the Grant Medical College, Bombay, went to England for further studies. The Pathans demurred; they feared the young man would turn Christian. He returned, indeed, with an English wife, but his religion in tact.

Ghaffar Khan failed to matriculate. He learnt not at school, but in life. There was talk of his going to England also, but domestic calamities intervened and Khan Sahib's unorthodox marriage finally ruled out the voyage. For a time Ghaffar Khan thought of an army career. "The military rank was not without its glamour. But Allah willed it otherwise. I was on a visit to a friend and I saw with my own eyes the loathsome spectacle of his being grossly insulted by a British officer of inferior rank. That decided me and saved me from a military career."



Then the Khan went to Aligarh. Aligarh had travelled a long way from Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Muslim *bourgeoisie* were palpably lining up with the national movement. New leaders arose; the Ali Brothers, Aligarh products both, Dr. M. A. Ansari and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. The compelling fervour of the Maulana's *Al Hilal* had deeply stirred Muslim opinion and Ghaffar Khan was profoundly affected. The beginnings of his political education were laid.

#### IV

It was 1919, the end of a War which India had helped to win and stood piously expecting political self-determination. But the Rowlatt Bills came, providing for arrests and trials without legal checks and formalities, and shattered every hope. There was a nation-wide agitation and Gandhi took the helm. Ghaffar Khan threw himself into the movement. He made his political maiden speech at an eventful meeting in Utmanzai; a hundred thousand people had gathered in the Frontier village to protest against the Rowlatt Act! There were hartals of course as everywhere in India. The Khan, indeed, made no overt act of *satyagraha*, but even his meeting upset the Government and he was arrested. There was no trial of any sort and he was marched off to prison hand-cuffed. He was a much mightier man than now, 'truly royal,'—he weighed sixteen stone—the ill-fitting fetters gnawed at his ankles and an iron bar clasped his neck. The jailor told him he would get accustomed to them! He stayed six months in jail and his father was with him.

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Meanwhile Dr. Khan Sahib, after passing out of St. Thomas Hospital, London—Jawaharlal Nehru first knew him there: "hardly a day passed by when we did not meet"—was serving with a British army in France. Of the distant rumblings in his native Frontier he had no notion; not a letter reached him while his father and his brother lay in duress.

About this time the Frontier was convulsed by a religious movement—the *Hijrat* (emigration)—that called on the Muslims to leave their fatherland rather than submit to British yoke. Thousands of Pathan families left their hearths and homes, sold their lands for a song, and trekked across the unmown fields and up the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan. Ghaffar Khan led a section of the *Muhajirins* (pilgrim-exiles), but the ill-starred venture came to naught. The Kabul Government was unhelpful and the exiles trekked back sadder and wiser.

Meanwhile the agitation in India over the post-war treatment of Turkey was gaining momentum. The Khilafat movement, led by Muslim radicals, marched proudly alongside of Congress. Ghaffar Khan became the President of the Frontier Khilafat Committee. Repression was swift, but not on the count of any civil disobedience.

The Khan had set his heart on national education, inspired by the splendid lead of the Haji of Turangzai, that 'stormy petrel of the Frontier.' There was an *Azad* (freedom) school at Utmanzai and soon there was a network of branch schools all over the Frontier. Government were

worried. "Why should your son take upon himself to establish this school when no one else is interested in it?" Chief Commissioner Sir John Maffey sternly questioned old Bahram Khan. The son replied that this work of national education was like *namaz*, an unalterable religious duty—there was no giving it up. "I am eager to face the King of these Kings in a manner worthy of a righteous person." So the Khan was arrested under section 40, Frontier Crimes Regulation (which denies the accused the elementary right of legal defence) and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Three years of racking misery—solitary cells, fetters, scurvy and lumbago, borne with stoic fortitude. He lost some fifty-five pounds.

Yet he was an exemplary prisoner. He would accept no favours nor brook any solicitous relaxing of jail discipline. His moralising influence was infectious and he was promptly removed out to a Punjab jail. There for the first time he read the Gita and the Granth Sahib and the Bible with fellow convicts. It is to Pandit Jagatram from the Andamans that he owes his passion for the Gita. He fasted and observed silence once a week. The analogy with Gandhi was now complete.

"What is faith unless it is expressed in one's own life?" said the Khan. Ghaffar Khan has gone Hindu, cavilled his bigoted Muslim oritios, but his friends from every part affectionately called him 'Frontier Gandhi.' He was a leaf from the Mahatma's book of life, 'the symbol of the courage and sacrifice of a gallant and indomitable

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people.' On the political horizon of India a new star had risen and shed an effulgent light.

Ghaffar Khan is amazed that the very name of the Congress should scare away some of his Muslim compatriots. The aim of the Congress—to free the oppressed, to feed the poor and clothe the naked—is to him in no wise different from the Prophet's mission, nothing inconsistent with Islam. It was wrong to think of the national Congress as a Hindu organisation. The fight for freedom, he said, was for the liberation of both Hindus and Mussalmans; 'the Muslims will oblige none by joining the Hindus.'

## V

The Khan came out of prison in 1924, but a different India greeted him. An ugly wave of communal rancour had swept over the country, and there was much religious mud-slinging. Ghaffar Khan quietly took up the work of social reform, of deflecting the Pathans from lawlessness and un-Islamic customs. The 'Anjuman-i-Islah-ul-Afghena' (Afghan Reform League) had done much solid work, and the Azad schools turned out sterling workers, simple, effective men of action. Out of these were fashioned the *Khudai Khidmatgars*—Servants of God.

They do not wear red shirts; their uniforms originally of white *khadi*, are chocolate brown. It was the Government that with sinister astuteness called them 'Red Shirts'—'a case of giving a dog a bad name and then of hanging him.' They have nothing to do with Soviet

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Communism and have no left-wing economic programme. Primarily recruited for social work, their slogan was ' *korjaraao* ' (reform yourselves).

The *Khudai Khidmatgars* were on oath to be loyal to God, the community and the Motherland ; to be always non-violent ; to expect no reward for services and to live a pure life. Their discipline was Spartan and all weapons, even *lathis*, were taboo. They faced shootings and *lathi* charges with a cool courage and calm determination. The movement thrived on repression, but it eschewed violence with striking self-restraint. In 1931 the 'Red Shirts' became a regular part of the Congress, its 'private (non-violent) army' in the Frontier.

Here is the Marching Song of the 'Red Shirts,' with the lilting swing of the Charge of the Light Brigade :

" We are the army of God,  
Of death and wealth care-free,  
We march, our leader and we,  
Ready to die.

In the name of God we march,  
And in His name we die,  
We serve in the name of God,  
God's servants are we.

God is our King,  
And great is He,  
We serve our Lord,  
His slaves are we.

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Our country's cause,  
We serve with our breath,  
For such an end,  
Glorious is death.

We serve and we love,  
Our people and our cause,  
Freedom is our aim,  
And our lives are its price.

We love our country,  
And respect our country,  
Zealously protect it,  
For the glory of the Lord.

By cannon or gun undismayed,  
Soldiers and horsemen;  
None can come between,  
Our work and our duty."

In May 1930 the Chief Commissioner of the Frontier made the following proclamation :—" You must prevent Congress volunteers, wearing red jackets, from entering your villages. They call themselves *Khudai Khidmatgars* (Servants of God). But in reality they are the servants of Gándhi. They wear the dress of Bolsheviks. They will create the same atmosphere as you have heard in the Russian dominion." Robert Bernays found, on a scrutiny, that these lurid statements had not a vestige of truth. "Not a rouble is coming across the mountains into the coffers of the 'Red Shirts.'"

The 1920 Reforms were not extended to the Frontier. The Simon Commission indeed proposed a constitution of a sort, but it was so hedged in by limitations that it merely irritated the Pathan intelligentsia. The resolute call of the Congress was heard across the Indus and the Frontier rallied man to man. There were accusations and warnings. 'Gandhi's lieutenants were playing with fire in a powder magazine!' Congress emissaries, authority protested, wantonly strove to embroil the tribes with Government and to undermine the British position. The Khan and his 'Red Shirts' were categorically accused of preaching sedition among the Mohmands and of setting up a 'parallel government.' Indeed the tribesmen broke out and burnt some levy posts on the Chitral road and the truculent Afridis swooped down on Peshawar in 1930. The bazaars of the city were full of strange tales—'stories that the British Raj was crumbling and that a new Congress Raj was taking its place.' The vicarious responsibility for it all was promptly visited on the 'Red Shirts.'

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact brought no peace to the Frontier. "There was a permanent state of tension there, and Government was a military affair, with special laws and ordinances." The 'Red Shirts' were marked out for condign punishment. Mazullah Khan, a well-known landlord and *Khudai Khidmatgar*, had all his property worth over Rs. 1,50,000 attached for delay in paying up Rs. 2,000 in land revenue. Gunning the 'Red Shirts' seemed to be a popular sport of the soldiery, said an American observer. The miserable men were made to

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run the gauntlet of military cordons and bayoneted, or stripped and hurled into freezing streams, or thrown from burning house-tops. "You do not know what other things have been done to us" Ghaffar Khan once told Jawaharlal Nehru. "The whole show," an English officer confessed, "was an awful butchery." Peshawar was in a state of siege and the Frontier Province an excluded area for the Congress. Vallabhbhai Patel, banned entry, nevertheless produced a report which was promptly proscribed.

One piece of bravery stands out. The Garhwali regiment refused to fire upon an unarmed crowd. They were court-martialled and immured for long sentences. Gandhi attempted, quite unsuccessfully, to secure their release from the Viceroy.

## VI

Then the Government promulgated the Frontier Ordinance and prepared an inventory of charges. Ghaffar Khan was accused of Congress propaganda in the Frontier and of preaching non-payment of taxes. He was quoted to have declared that the British must be driven out of India. Dr. Khan Sahib's offence always seems to have been that he is the brother of Abdul Ghaffar Khan! The Khan brothers were arrested, and with them Dr. Khan Sahib's sons, Sadulla Khan, Obeidullah Khan and Hidayatullah Khan and their male cousins. There was of course a general round-up of 'Red Shirts;' nearly a thousand leaders were arrested. Obeidullah Khan made fasting history by



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undertaking a hunger-strike for 78 days ; "the boy," said his father, "is a specimen of rare courage and daring." He did not seek to see his son nor deter him from his fell purpose ; the brothers merely sent instructions as to the disposal of the corpse if the worst should befall !

After discharge from prison the Khan brothers went to Wardha. They were under orders not to enter the Frontier and they were under discipline not to offer civil disobedience. They cast all their cares on Gandhi ; that anchor held. Jammalal Bajaj, that prince among hosts, kept open house. It was a rare spiritual kinship. There was little talk of politics there. There were prayers and readings from the Ramayana. "The music of that *bhajan* fills my soul," confessed the Khan. But the quietude of that simple communion was rudely disturbed ; on January 7, 1935 there was a warrant for his arrest. Ghaffar Khan went cheerfully to serve the will of Him who used him for His purposes.

Jawaharlal Nehru narrates a weird experience : "In the heat of that summer afternoon I dozed off, and I remember having a curious dream. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was being attacked on all sides and I was fighting to defend him. I woke up in an exhausted state, feeling very miserable, and my pillow was wet with tears."

It is Gandhi's dream, some day, to 'bury' himself in a Frontier village.

VII

The Khan's detractors point to the apparent contrariety of his example and precept. The uncompromising champion of national education, they complain, nurtured his children in the very system he condemned. Indeed, the Khan's eldest son spent years in England and America learning sugar-refining, two younger boys were sent to Col. Brown's School at Dehra Dun and his daughter attended an English school. Dr. Khan Sahib's education was wholly English and his eldest son, Sadullah, is a student of the Loughborough Engineering College. The answer to this seeming paradox can be no more positive than why Nehru sent his daughter to Oxford.

The Pathan "will go with you to Hell if you can win his heart, but you cannot force him even to go to Heaven," the Khan once declared. The patriotic movement in the Frontier, C. F. Andrews passionately urged, should be met by conciliation rather than by force. The Khan has been, at all times, 'amenable to love and reason.' Bernays records a revealing interview with the Frontier leader. The Khan told him in simple English: "The Government of India misunderstands my movement. I do not hate the British. I only want the same reforms for the Frontier Province as for the rest of India. I am not declaring against the payment of revenue. I am a landlord myself and I have paid my revenue. I have received no money from Russia. I have no connection with Russia. The British have put me in prison, but I do not hate them. My movement is social as well as political. I teach the 'Red

Shirts ' to love their neighbours and speak the truth. The Muslims are a war-like race ; they do not take easily to the gospel of non-violence. I am doing my best to teach it them."

On the night of the interview Bernays noted in his diary this refreshing impression : " Abdul Ghaffar Khan looks the embodiment of the traditional paintings of Christ. He is a kindly, gentle and rather lovable man. As well think that old George Lansbury is a dangerous revolutionary, as imagine that A. G. K. is the relentless enemy of the Raj ! But very soon he will be formidable if the Government continue to handle him as stupidly as they are doing now."

It is indeed high time that this remarkable man and his phenomenal movement should be seriously accounted for and not merely travestied. Even so, one met ever so recently the old frigid, unimaginative attitude and hostile rancour. To Sir William Barton (*India's North-West Frontier*,) Ghaffar Khan is but " a fanatical agitator whose object was to raise both border and ois-border Pathans against the British and drive them beyond the Indus." He is amazed that self-reliant Pathan intelligentsia should show " such enthusiasm for the little half-naked Faqir." The Frontier, he says, has not and never has been really interested in Hindu (Congress ?) politics ; India stops abruptly at the Indus. There could be little doubt that non-violence did not appeal to the Pathan mind, and if ' less balanced ' Pathans subscribed to the cult, it was merely political opportunism. The Congress party was exploiting

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Pathan fanaticism to weaken the British Raj ; Pathan extremists, on the other hand, were merely using the Congress, its organisation and resources to get political power into their own hands. An unsettled borderland was a Congress asset. But for all this the British policy of *laissez faire* was to blame. "The historians of the future" predicts Sir William "will probably find it difficult to explain why a strong Government allowed this wild fanatic a freehand to destroy the framework of law and order."

The historians of the future will find it a little difficult to explain how these sentiments came to be uttered at the threshold of a war which put the fate of the British Empire in the balance. It was certainly not the voice of peace and reason.

## VIII

Khan Sahib, it is true, headed the Frontier Ministry, but the glory was Ghaffar Khan's. *He* won the elections. The Khan himself was under a ban, but he influenced by proxy—the 'Red Shirts' topping the polls in a blaze of popularity despite patent handicaps. Dr. Khan Sahib made a sterling administrator, downright and sincere.

C. F. Andrews spent long days with Ghaffar Khan in intimate fellowship and noticed him in 'the smallest things as well as in those that were great.' The Khan, he found, was 'transparently sincere, with the simple directness of a child, and, above all things, a firm believer in God.' His gentleness and truth stood out. "His fearlessness," Andrews confessed, "made me feel his moral greatness." There was

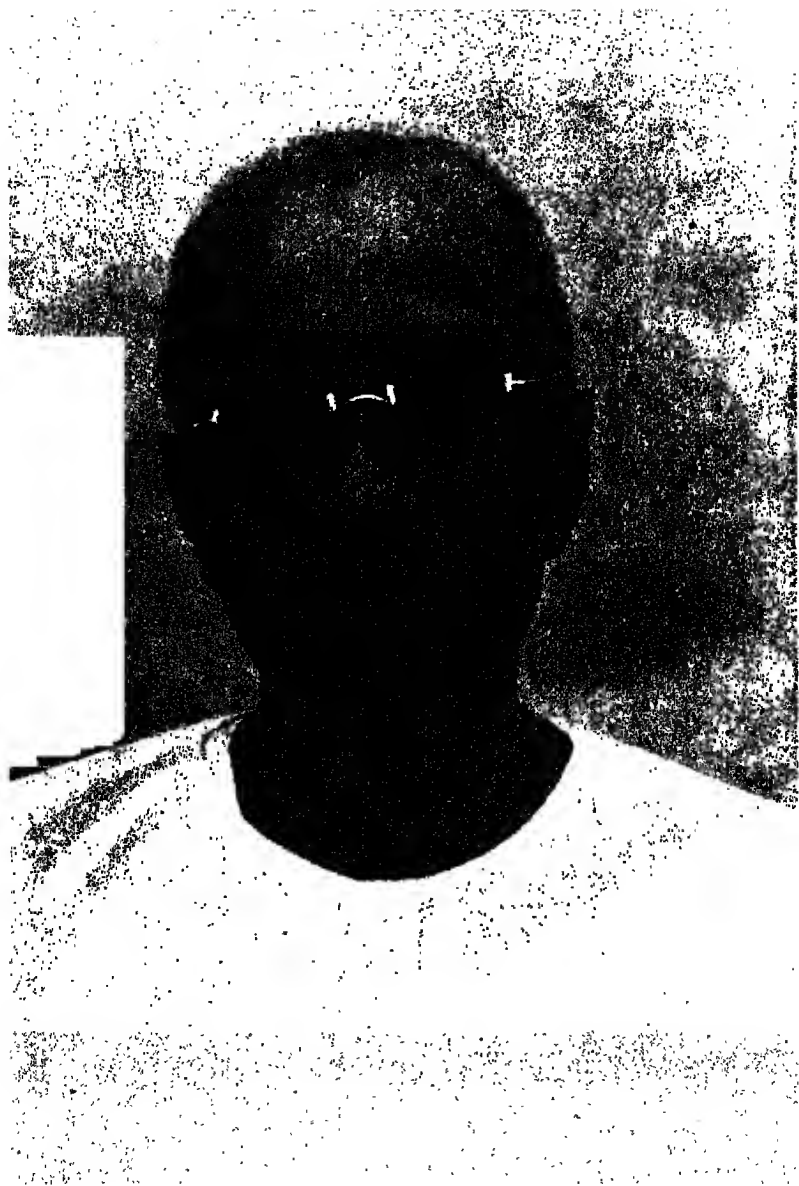
## TRIBUNES OF THE PEOPLE

no disguising it ; Ghaffar Khan wanted the British out of India. Independence is his demand, no less ; if you make it impossible for him to speak and act for freedom, he immediately courts arrest. "It is better to die rather than accept another's rule." But one thing he will never have—violence. It may be, says Andrews, that sometimes his mission has failed or his lesson has been ill-learned by his followers and perhaps, as he fears, a wave of violence may sweep over the province and undo all his work. That will be in spite of the Khan. But the Government will not take him at his word ; they can only think of him in terms of dark intrigue, sedition and subversive propaganda. Oh, the pity of it !

'From head to heel a soldier,' a very devout Muslim who never misses the *namaz*, among the highest in the counsels of the Congress, fearless as a child, and immensely fond of children, apostle of non-violence and truth, the Frontier people's *Badshah*, and a chronic political convict, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan assumes the stature of a Samson, with a giant's strength but not using it like a giant.

"Thus we greet one, who untiring through abuse and  
sighs and tears,  
Bravely marching forward, carried high the banner  
all the years,  
All the years of stress and struggle, ever foremost  
in the fight,  
Never flags his valiant spirit in the strife for truth  
and right."





## CHAKRAVARTI RAJAGOPALACHARI

CHAKRAVARTI RAJAGOPALACHARI, 'that wonderful old Brahman fox' in John Gunther's irreverent phrase, is the Congress 'Lost Leader.' "He alone breaks from the van and the free men." The Congress marched while he boasted his quiescence in Muslim self-determination and recorded "one lost soul more." They "let him receive the new knowledge." The whirligig of time brings in its surprises and revenges. The 'Tamil Mahatma,' Gandhi's erstwhile 'authoritative interpreter,' is now a Congress rebel, self-outlawed. The spare, tallish, ascetic figure of C. R., his famous sobriquet, the piercing eyes blacked out by dark spectacles, has always dominated Congress counsels by the sheer weight of superior dialectics. An inveterate 'no-changer,' he has changed enormously—almost his critics complain, making a political *volte face*. He has, they say, over-reached himself in a tragedy of pure intellect and abortive opportunism. While the Congress taboed Pakistan, he defiantly canvassed self-determination for the Muslim League! When Congress would have no truck with Government, he asked for special leave to head a co-operating administration in Madras. He risked reproof—more, he reproved reproof. Soured, he walked out of Congress with singular courage. He is sorry for the Congress!

C. R. is unemotional; his tranquil, collected voice is eminently suited to construct the perfect syllogisms for which he is famous. He has a genius for parable-making



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and his analogies, in this land of faith, are appropriately mythological. His logic is flawless; it is cold, direct and remorseless. He has a superb, almost native, sense of proportion and a becoming modesty that is *not* humility. Of austere mein and fixed purpose, accentuated by his bare white apparel, C. R. knows no passion. He has no doctrinaire fads. His greatest enthusiasm was for a terrible constraint—Prohibition! He is calm, dry, arid and prosaically intellectual. Had he lacked his eminent sense of humour, this powerful man might have been dangerous—almost inhuman, a Robespierre. His smiling urbanity is just a gesture of greeting; it is not an invitation to compromise. He will not temporise justice.

Personal ambition C. R. has none. Power does not attract him. He became Premier of Madras in spite of himself, unexpectedly, although perhaps naturally and inevitably. Madras Congress politics was a welter of ambitious mediocrity; it sadly lacked outstanding leadership. He was pitchforked into compulsory power. It was tempting Providence. He would fain retire away from the cliques and manoeuvres of politics to the peaceful retreat of his Tiruchengode and contemplate on the Upanishads and Vedantic philosophy. A deeply religious mystic, he is no politician of the market-place. But the times are out of joint and patriotism makes stern demands.

## II

Born in an orthodox family in the Salem district of the Madras Presidency, Rajagopalachari received his early education in an Indian State—Mysore. The child C. R.

was not exactly father of the man; there was little really in those far-off days that promised the consummate statesman. His splendid social courage and political purpose came to him in after years, after Gandhi fired the spark that has shot up in a luminous flame to-day. He is, like Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, a lawyer turned politician, with a substantial record of professional prosperity. As a lawyer at Salem he achieved eminence. His reputation as an astute advocate has more than survived his legal interlude; the memory of it lingers even to-day. His well-known defence of Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, then of the Congress persuasion, rocketed him into deserved fame and he at once became a lawyer of extra-mofussil importance. Promptly he moved over to Madras, and rapidly built up a metropolitan reputation.

Came Gandhi and *Satyagraha*. The political deluge claimed vast sacrifices. In giving up his large practice, C. R. was in illustrious company, of C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel. At once he became Gandhi's right-hand man, an ardent and devoted liegeman. He was the Mahatma's "official" spokesman; the custodian, it was whispered, of his inmost thoughts. When his chief went to jail C.R. ably edited the *Young India*. When in 1922 C. R. Das led a virtual 'revolt' against Gandhi's political formula and almost dangerously swung the Congress to his Council programme by a thrilling rhapsody, it was the tranquil, yet unbudging 'no-change' stand of Rajagopalachari at Gaya that saved the Congress for Gandhi. He won a singular victory. It was a colossal

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measure of strength, but C. R. cut like steel, incisive, direct and flawless.

Some fourteen years afterwards, this uncompromising 'no-changer' was the warmest protagonist of the parliamentary programme. Time with a cruel irony—or subtle humour is it?—connived to make him Premier of Madras. The ghost of C. R. Das may well have been tickled. Indeed, a lesser man than Rajagopalachari might have felt 'intellectually and morally intimidated by past predilections.' But he acted with exemplary courage and reckless of vulgar cavilling. C. R.'s dynamic mind has grown, imperceptibly and radically. His political evolution is a fascinating study. With frank, avowed disillusionment, he sensed the changed political scene of India. The old shibboleths no longer held and the ever increasingly new problems called for a fresh ideology, a new offensive. Political consistency was hardly the point. Gandhi's pure politics seemed strangely discordant in a helpless India ridden by rank communalists, time-servers and agents of reaction. The people with one voice wanted the Congress to go to the legislatures—the 1935 elections were a distinct plebiscite on the parliamentary programme. What right had the victorious Congress to disown its people, to flout their wishes and mandate? The country must be saved, even if it were all, from its irresponsible masters and the people must be vindicated.

### III

As Premier of Madras, Rajagopalachari made ministerial history. He combed the manes of hoary civilians

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and awed hardened funkeys at the Secretariat. The Chief Secretary to Government, C. F. Brackenbury, thankfully accepted his gift of *khadi* and actually made a suit of it and wore it. Lord Erskine, the Governor, openly admired his strong-willed Premier. Vested interests cowered before his crusading legislation. Privilege was outlawed. He was an unrelenting administrator and set about the task of Government with the furious earnestness of a political idealist. He drastically cut down overgrown salaries and simply ignored grumbling officials. He sent whole districts dry and suavely expounded the ethics of prohibition, his grand passion. Always the poor man's friend, he vigorously legislated for agriculturists' relief. Hindi he introduced in schools at any cost and sent misguided agitators to jail with firm suavity. He was masterful and would stand no nonsense. A noted civil resister, he administered law and order with consummate ruthlessness. He quelled political intransigence and freely made use of the police. He promptly arrested the Socialist Batliwala for irresponsible propaganda. He was violently assailed but stood his ground with a quiet and complacent dignity.

Until his epochal break with the Congress, C. R. had a tremendous headquarters reputation: at Wardha his credit stood rocketed. This centrifugal pull secured local loyalties; he was the Madras Gauletier.

### IV

Look at C. R. telescopically, study the springs of his political impulses. You may gauge somewhat of his complex personality. This Vaishnavite Brahmin is a social

revolutionary. Chairman of Salem Municipality, he broke religious tradition by posting *pariahs* to operate Brahmin water-taps and did not flinch despite a storm of protest. The Harijan movement of Congress is comparatively, to this heroism, a thing of yesterday. C. R. was a Pussyfoot Johnson long before Congress even thought of Prohibition. This man who has never been abroad is to-day, next to Gandhi, the most publicised Indian politician in the world Press. Hermit-like, meek and retiring, C. R. knows the uses of advertisement; he permitted photographs to be taken and published of his austere simple ways, down to washing his own clothes ! This *Karma Yogi* is a politician *par excellence* : he blends wonderfully western diplomaoy and dictatorship. He was, when in power, a strange amalgam of Hitler and Chanakya. His innate simplicity he inherits from his father, a profound Sanskrit scholar, admired by Lord Connemera. It was given to another Governor to adulate the greater offspring. But C. R. is no Anglophobe; proficient in English, as a student he was advised to go to Oxford, but replied simply: "India is quite enough for me." Yet he expressed his modernity by being the first to own a motor car in Salem.

There is a heart of stubborn courage in his frail body. Once, C. R. was seriously ill with pneumonia ; the doctor despaired of his recovery, but C. R. knowing better, promptly changed the doctor and recovered ! C. R. carries this incorrigible unorthodox optimism into politics. There is no Gordian knot that he will not readily set himself to unravel by some empirioal, logistic formula. Opposition he

does not fight; he overcomes by absorbing it. As Premier of Madras he effaced the Justice Party by a superb political disarmament. So, he will not ignore the Muslim League, driving it into rancorous opposition by irritatingly under-estimating it: he would, rather, parley with it, on its own terms, drawing it into the web of his persuasion.

## V

C. R. has staged a remarkable come-back to Indian politics with his 'Split India' formula. He shares with Gandhi (minus the Congress High Command) the centre of the Indian scene; he is to-day the focus of political foot-lights. Gone out of Congress, he pointed *The Way out* (Oxford University Press) of the Indian impasse—Back to Cripps—and has incidentally 'tied up his affairs in inextricable knots.' Since his divorce from Congress C. R. has practised political courtship with amazing tenacity, now wooing Government and now the implacable Mr. Jinnah. Failures do not daunt him, although they may be the slipping stones to unrevealed success. First, he conceded Pakistan not as a principle but as an expedient—a make-shift condition of 'office on any terms'—and knocked at Jinnah's, but the door was shut amain. Then he begged Government for a plane—nothing like a direct appeal to the sovereign British people—but Government could not spare any. Likewise, an undeterred request for an interview with Gandhi was unceremoniously turned down. His services were simply not required.

But C. R.'s burden has stirred him to ceaseless effort: he declared his manifesto thus: "Patriotic men and women

who are outside prison are expected to reconsider the situation and take independent decisions. This is a responsibility that attaches to civil freedom." It had been better if C. R. had *considered* the situation in its fundamental aspect of Indian freedom; he has been doing far too much reconsidering, producing some unavailing formula or taking up some irreconcilable position at every political turn. He has been shiftily. Frankly, Jinnah ignores him because *he* cannot deliver the goods and Government are mildly amused, alternatively patting him and sharply rebuking him for over-dosed 'realism.' But C. R. is excellent political propaganda for Government and they know it; he effectively advertises the communal chasm in India, doing some entertaining rope-walking the while, diligently working up the uncertain proofs of Government theorems. And C. R. is to-day the single Indian protagonist of the Cripps proposals, revised by Linlithgow. What greater proof of the basic sincerity of the Cripps plan can Government require than that the proven ex-Premier of Madras should champion their acceptance? That is what Government have been trying to tell world opinion, a little clumsily, perhaps—how sweetly obliging of C. R. to do the telling for Government! It suits Government that the warring Indian elements should strive for mastery anon; it is the *raison d'être* of Imperialism. C. R. serves Government ill to drive them to a corner with his six-point scheme, the more dangerous with Gandhi's blessings; if the League accept it, you knock out the last moral foothold of the British in India—their especial responsibility for

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'minority' interests, barring the Indian States. But Mr. Jinnah may be counted upon not to create such an awkward situation! C. R. may be in a hurry to grasp power at any impossible cost, mortgaging the integrity of India, but Government are in no such desperate haste to part with dominion. The freedom of India is, essentially, if you don't know it, the concern of Britain!

Of course, the whole logic of C. R.'s position amounts to this :—A most ruthless enemy strikes at the eastern frontiers and a deadly famine threatens to engulf the land, while the Congress Governments have abdicated from their posts and languish in jails. India must be saved and her salvation can only come through a National Government. This cannot be without the Muslim League joining in, and it will not join unless you concede it Pakistan. Therefore, placate the League, accept the principle of Pakistan, but make it a condition that the League will join in the demand for independence and for a full National Government. Note, C. R. concedes Pakistan not as a principle, but as a manoeuvre in power politics. Naturally, his critics reply : " My dear C. R., the provinces of India are not your private property and you cannot make a gift of them. This India has been and must remain an integral and indivisible nation-state and we dare you to barter even an inch of our Motherland. And isn't it queer Mr. C. R., that when the *Zeitgeist* is moving powerfully and irresistibly towards political integration, you should preach dismemberment that must certainly result in our annihilation?" Jinnah suspects this sweet persuasive offer, this seemingly suicidal



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move by the opponent. It might, for aught he knows, be a political time-bomb. So he will not, for some time, even touch or look at it. Pakistan is just a symbol of discord, a tactical abstraction that not even Mr. Jinnah dare formulate. O. R. simply cannot seize it and pin him down to the brass-tacks. It is grossly unfair to the League's position!

As for Government, they are frankly not interested. Put yourself in their position. There is really nothing they have not got to-day in waging this war that they stand to gain by a gratuitous grant of independence to India. They have the men, the material and the wherewithal. The war, for them, is proceeding most encouragingly, far beyond their expectations, and there is really no compelling necessity why they must oblige O. R., establish a 'National Government' and invite on themselves, God knows what political troubles and complications. When Cripps was flown to India two years ago things definitely were *different*; Government were in dire extremity and needed all the goodwill in the world. What can Congress give Government? Just moral support, I suppose. They think they can do very well without it, as in fact they have been. There you have the Indian deadlock.

O. R. is war-weary. For him the struggle no longer avails. He is obsessed with a desire to do something, to build on other foundations, on the debris of history. He would fain play the Grand Ambassador in Indian politics, risking every rebuff. His punctuated interventions, however, have been singularly ill-starred.





## SAROJINI NAIDU

“**C**OME my General ! Come my soldiers ! I am only a woman, only a poet. But as a woman I give you the weapons of faith and courage and the shield of fortitude. And as a poet, I fling out the banner of song and sound, the bugle call to battle. How shall I kindle the flame which shall waken you men from slavery ! ”

Thus, Sarojini Naidu led the Congress to battle. She is the poetic touch to the Congress. The poet in her motivates the politician. In the high tension of Congress politics she is the gust of vital fresh air ; she is ruggedly, almost mannishly, real, with an impulsive gaiety. Like Marie Antoinette, she is ‘the only man about the Court.’ She is the first woman in India. She is an embodied emotion, vibrant and triumphant ‘whose race is just begun.’ She is Gandhi’s *aide-de-camp*, always about him, a ministering angel. Sixty-five, she enjoys a beauty that puts physical loveliness in the shade ; she has mastered, for a woman, the most difficult art of not ageing. Her ‘forward-striding’ spirit has stirred the youth of India to great purposes—it was her moving eloquence that put Jawaharlal Nehru on the road of his greater destiny. She is the first orator in Congress, speaking several languages with enthralling fluency ; she invariably proposes the vote of thanks. Her speeches thrill, they communicate fire. Once Lord Selborne told her : “Madam, we are grateful for the poetic touch you have brought to our prosaic proceedings.” The story goes that Gandhi, at a loss to break the ice with Irwin, read out

of a book of Sarojini's poems, and the momentous conversations got started.

Sarojini Naidu is radiant, her vital spirit kindles, she exudes exuberance. 'She thinks with her nerves, she feels with her intellect.' Even her poems flush, 'we touch heat.' Her brilliant mind flashes like a sabre ; her aggressive wit scintillates until it pierces. She went to America : " The moment my boat arrived I was set upon by the livewire American reporters, who all screamed at me : 'what do you think of Katherine Mayo ? ' I replied : ' Katherine Mayo ? Who is she ? I think that was her fittest epitaph." (Copy to Beverley Nichols). Once the conversation turned on Americans. " But of course one can't help liking them. They're so enthusiastic. Reaching out for knowledge all the time." And her hands, with devastating mimicry, traversed an abortive arc. Gokhale hailed Jinnah as the ' ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.' Sarojini, abbreviating the phrase, summed up the tragedy of a lifetime—"the ambassador of H.-M. (His Majesty's) unity.' Once in South Africa, General Hertzog asked her why Indians there do not repatriate to their homeland ; she rapped out: " I might as well ask why you Hollanders in South Africa don't return to the Netherlands ! " On occasion she said with biting sarcasm: " I am not so foolish as to imagine that the Government have suddenly lost their proved capacity for provoking popular resentment."

Sarojini's sense of humour, rare in Congress circles, is part of her 'strange wisdom.' Her laughter is purgative ; 'like her father, she is a mystic jester, laughing.' Of all

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things that life has given her, she prizes the gift of laughter 'as beyond price.' Her conversation sparkles ; in her salon at the Taj where she kept court, it floated in ripples. Into her caravanserai drifted a mixed cavalcade, princes and politicians, film stars and suffragettes, journalists and sycophants. With them 'she can and is prepared to discuss anything from cabbages to Kings.' She is the best hostess in India, 'she drinks large draughts of intellectual day.' John Barrymore found her charming, Somerset Maugham was enchanted and Robert Bernays, with gay flippancy, called her his 'girl friend.' Her engaging audacities command fierce loyalties. Seated in her high-backed chair, she is ever the centre of the piece—a picture of perpetual motion, articulating, gesticulating. She lives in a blaze of light. Her tongue must speak.

### ·II

Sarojini Naidu, born February 13, 1879, comes of formidable stock, the Chatterjees of Brahmanagram, celebrated throughout Eastern Bengal. "My ancestors for thousands of years have been lovers of the forest and mountain oaves, great dreamers, great scholars, great ascetics." They practised Yoga ! Of her father—a D. Sc. of Edinburgh, he studied brilliantly at Bonn and founded the Nizam's College at Hyderabad—let Sarojini speak: "My father is a dreamer himself, a great dreamer, a great man whose life has been a magnificent failure. I suppose in the whole of India there are few men whose learning is greater than his, and I don't think there are many men more beloved. He has a great white beard and the profile

of Homer, and a laugh that brings the roof down. He has wasted all his money on two great objects : to help others and on alchemy. He holds huge courts every day in his garden of all the learned men of all religions—Rajahs and beggars and saints and downright villians." Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya reared a brilliant family.

A nine-year child, Sarojini was stubborn and refused to speak English : her father, in punishment, shut her up in a room for a whole day and she emerged 'a full-blown linguist.' Her father, a distinguished scientist, loved to fashion Sarojini after him ; but her mother—she wrote some lovely Bengali lyrics in her youth—proved the stronger influence. Although 'of a very fanciful and dreamy nature, Sarojini had no predilection for poetry as a child—it came in spite of her. "One day when I was 11, I was sighing over a sum in Algebra, it wouldn't come right ; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down." A poet was born. At thirteen she wrote a longish poem, *a la* 'Lady of the Lake,' some 1,300 lines in six days, and then a 2,000-line drama, 'a full-fledged passionate thing' written impishly to spite her doctor who said she was very ill. The doctor was right and her health broke down completely. But there was no stopping her ; she read voraciously. "I wrote a novel, I wrote fat volumes of journals : I took myself very seriously in those days."

Then at sixteen, rather precociously, she conceived an inter-communal passion for young Dr. Naidu ; her father,

worried, packed her off to England, but with little avail. In December 1898 she returned and to the 'scandal of all India, broke through the bonds of caste' and married the doctor. She was three years in England; at King's, London and then at Girton, Cambridge. ("But don't let us talk about it. I did nothing there. Yes, I was a pioneer—long before any other Indian girl at Cambridge").

## III

Treasures of the adolescent Sarojini have come down from Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse. Although a child of sixteen years, she was 'as unlike the usual English maiden of that age as a lotus or cactus is unlike a lily of the valley.' Symons wrote: "All the life of the tiny figure seemed to concentrate itself in the eyes; they turned towards beauty as the sun-flower turns towards the sun. You might have taken her for a child. She spoke little, and in a low voice, like gentle music; and she seemed, wherever she was, to be alone." This child had already lived through all a woman's life, amazing in her mental maturity, the 'Wisdom of the East' in embryo. Like Keats, like whom and Goethe it was her ambition to be, Sarojini is extremely sensitive to physical sensations; she is almost pagan in her love of abundant life, autochthonous—"no, no, no, a thousand times no! how can one deliberately renounce this coloured, unquiet fiery human life of the earth?" The bird is still on the wing. She has always longed to be 'a wild free thing of the air, like the birds, with a song in my heart.' But already Gosse sensed in her



the rumblings of 'a graver music'—the note of girlish ecstasy had passed. "The sight of much suffering has thinned her jasmine garlands and darkened the azure of her sky." There was about her a strange feverishness of texture; 'her body was never without suffering, or her head without conflict,' she alternated between moods of intense anguish and intense ecstasy. She has 'a fierce intimacy with bereavement and grief and despair.' She has lived in close companionship with a nation's sorrow in bondage.

Gosse fathered Sarojini's poetry, chastened and uplifted it. Let him tell the oft-told story. "I entreated to be allowed to see what she had composed, and a bundle of Mss. was slipped into my hand. I hastened to examine it as soon as I was alone, but now there followed a disappointment." The verses were "skilful in form, correct in grammar and blameless in sentiment," but totally without individuality. Western in feeling and in imagery, they were founded on reminiscences of Tennyson and Shelley—'a rechauffe of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting.' It was the note of the mocking bird with a vengeance, in a falsely English vein. He entreated her to write no more about robins and skylarks in a landscape of the Midland counties; he begged of her "some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul." He pointed the way to her *Golden Threshold* (1905);

*The Bird of Time* (1912) and the *Broken Wing* (1917) followed later. (Note, the bird had broken its wing; it touched the Indian earth and its turmoil in 1919).

She created a sensation. Gosse found her 'the most brilliant, the most original, as well as the most correct of all the natives of Hindustan who have written in English;' a graceful compliment that detracts nothing from Toru Dutt's more authentic poetry. Symons thought Sarojini's poems possessed 'an individual beauty of their own,' with an Oriental magic in them. The English Press lavished superlative praise. "Her poetry seems to sing itself as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves" wrote *The Times*; *The Academy* had "not for a very long time seen a volume of poetry so full of promise and real achievement;" "her verses were songs, poems of pure gold." It is true she sprang from the very soil of India, but she brought a new note into English verse; she wrote about Indian life and legend working with English materials 'from the inside' for Englishmen. She was immediately understood. (Her politics is 'from the outside' to them—they don't understand).

To Sarojini herself her "poor casual little poems seem to be less than beautiful;" she wrote to Symons: "I am not a poet really. I have the vision and the desire but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full of beauty and the spirit of greatness I should be exultantly silent for ever; but I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral." Married six years, Sarojini Naidu wrote again to Symons in 1904—the years had

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brought sunshine and hope—"Do you know I have some very beautiful poems floating in the air and if the gods are kind I shall cast my soul like a net and capture them this year. If the gods are kind—and grant me a little measure of health. It is all I need to make my life perfect, for the very 'Spirit of Delight' that Shelley wrote of dwells in my little home. It is full of music of birds in the garden and children in the long arched verandah." For the children had been born and been given glorious names—Jaya Surya (Sun of Victory), Padmaja (Lotus-born), Ranadheera (Lord of Battles), and Leelamani (Jewel of Delight)—and her little temple tinkled with love and laughter.

Although Sarojini Naidu has abandoned poetry for politics—sad commentary on Indian politics—it has always been the supreme desire of her soul to write "one poem, one line of enduring verse even." But Fate, eddying, shuffles her on the high tide of politics, disturbing her passionate tranquillity; she reflects wistfully: "perhaps, I shall die without realising that longing which is at once an exquisite joy and an unspeakable anguish to me." But who can tell? Perhaps, she might, like Milton, return from polemics to her greater poetry.

#### IV

Gandhi's protege, Sarojini Naidu has been in the thick of Congress with him, enduring every travail. Tagore told her: "When the house is on fire the poet must cease singing and go to fetch water." Marching Congress to the sea, Gandhi was arrested on his famous

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pilgrimage to Dandi ; bidden to take his place, Sarojini led a brilliant raid against the Dharsana salt depot—the crass police formed a cordon, denying her food and water. She would not move and put the boot on the other leg : she chaffed the police on their *satyagraha* ! Government have often put her body behind stone walls and steel bars, but that is of course the least essential part of her. Deputising for Gandhi in South Africa, she made a tremendous impression: sequel—at the Belgaum Congress the South African Indian delegation made an embarrassing request : “ We have given you our priceless Gandhiji, instead of him you send us Sarojini Devi ! ”

She takes no sides ; she has (rare quality in a woman) a refreshing spirit of compromise. She is entirely without the pale of controversial Congress politics ; she shines as a peace-maker. She is an eloquent advocate of a ‘ united front ’—Nehru thinks it will not work ; temporising every section, the result will be ‘ a united standstill, a united and extensive display of back.’ She is an epitome of the possibilities of Indian women. President of the Women’s Conference, she is no suffragette : “ we are cowards by compulsion.” She must be appraised in her context ; half-a-century ago she dared to be *different*. She was the first woman to be elected President of Congress. She is the most travelled member of the Congress High Command ; alone, she ‘ discovered’ the New World.

Sarojini Naidu is a paradox. A Bengali, she belongs to Hyderabad ; a Brahmin, she married a Sudra ; an Indian,

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she wrote glorious poetry in English. Her passionate lyricism, transmuted into flaming nationalism, flows into 'the broad international current.' Her hand rocks the Congress cradle and rules it.

FINIS

